

The Explanation, or the Story

by Valkafinatic

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Summary: Darkness, fear, anger, pain... so.. much... PAIN. My body screams at me for probably the thousandth time in my life to just give up, to die and leave this world, But just like all the other times a small reason always seems to pop up in the back of my mind when I'm ready to just end. I still have to keep moving. If I don't, all this will be for nothing. I'll fail him. M later chap

1. Prologue

****I own nothing. Though I wish I did.****

Prologue

I know what you are looking for. An explanation that can quickly state the reasons for my actions thus far. But I could never sum up into a few words everything that has effected the path that I have gone on to get to the present I am at now.

Through out my life I have experienced betrayal, loneliness, hopelessness, and felt pain the likes of which would make men three times my size shudder at the mere thought of. But I have also experienced love, kindness, and the truest, purest happiness one could ever feel. The feeling so strong I am still surprised my heart did not burst when I had felt it.

Knowing this how can you ask me to explain so much in so little. Even if I managed to do so you would not see the true meaning lying beyond the explanation. You would see nothing more than what was on the surface. And just like nearly everyone else you would only manage to see the labels that I have gained through my journey. Fiend, Slave, Traitor, Outcast,... runt.

No.

If you wish for that go elsewhere now to hear the opinions of others.
I will not waste my breath with you.

However, if you have the patience to listen, I will unveil to you secrets that almost no one else in this world knows. But for me to do that, I must start from the beginning. The very beginning.

And the beginning starts about... 42 years ago. In a land, far to the south, called Rome.

****Authors note****

****Yes, this is Valka speaking. ****

****NO i do not own anything pertaining to any one except the words currently typed on the screen.****

****I am writing this because I have heard so many different suggestions to the reasoning behind Valka/Valhallarama's disappearance that it is either she left dew to choice and is currently a bitch because of it or she just died. I honestly think a new possibility should be stated.****

****It's truly going to be her life story as I think it happened, from the time of birth to the second movies beginning.****

****Before you ask, no I have not read the books. I'm sorry, big whoopdy doo. I still like HTTYD and am a huge fan of the movie, mini movies, and TV series. And to me that's good enough.****

****I'm just tired of all this hatred toward Valka. (Book readers forgive me please if i am speaking out of term) But I believe that Valka truly, deeply loved Hiccup and Stoick, but might end up (in the movie) just being an unfortunate victim of circumstance.****

****Anyway, no more ranting or spoilers. This is my first story so very likely the quality will get better as I go along. Happy reading.****

2. The beginning, and The Casting

****I own nothing.****

****Hi guys. I'm back! :D I have chosen to try (emphasis on TRY) and update this thing once every week, if not then definitely once every other week. Please do not ask me to post sooner, you can't rush art. If I do, it will just come out sloppy, messy, and disgusting. :P(And nobody likes that, now do they?) My personal goal is to have this finished before the movie comes out in theaters.****

****But I do have a life, if something occurs in it to prevent me from entering another chapter I will inform you. Then I will update as soon as possible. This way the story can keep moving and you get too enjoy it.****

****That's all for now. Happy reading!****

The Beginning and the Casting

At the outskirts of the Roman empire, where the highest piece of Roman land meets with the Atlantic ocean, a small farming town sits precariously perched at the edge of a low hanging cliff face. The earth in constant barrage of endless waves roaring and crashing against its side. The wind buffeting in from the sea like a never-ending whistling that runs past one's ears.

Just a few yards from this battle between the elements sits a small hut of a building made of stone and wood. A small wisp of smoke omitting from the back window. Three souls stand just outside of the tiny wooden door that serves as a gateway into the warm hut. Yet none of them move to enter the warmth even as they shiver from the intense cold of the night. The tallest of the three figures, a middle-aged man, stood like a wall against the buffeting wind paying it no heed even as it tossed around the dark brown shaggy hair that adorned his head and seemingly toyed with his scraggly beard. The clean and regal way he held himself and the exquisite robe he wore stated of high status. His face, arms, and hands however, spoke of years worth of work implying that his position was not by birth. His piercing hazel gaze never moved from the door in front of him as if a great force had them glued to it. He knows full well the dangerous and risky procedure occurring just beyond.

The smaller figure on the man's right was a gruff boy of 5 years, and nearly an exact copy of the man he clasped the hand of. The third and last of the group was a little girl of 4 years with thick russet hair and more of a soft curve to her face than the sharp features that adorned her father. Neither children speak a word, both still too young to understand the extent of what is happening, but fully aware of the seriousness of the situation.

As the trio stands there they all wince and cringe in unison. Each scream and moan emanating from within the hut like a sharp knife piercing the very air around them. All three knowing that the sounds come from a woman currently battling for her life to bring another into the world. After hours of anxious waiting however, the long-awaited phrase makes its appearance.

"Push once more my lady, your baby comes!"

Inside the hut, protected from the outside chill, two women kneel on either side of a stout woman. One holding onto the intense grip of the pained woman lying on the birthing cot, the other dabbing at the woman's sweat soaked forehead with a wet rag and wiping the fine russet hair from her pained face. A midwife dressed in wraps kneels in between the spread legs of the woman, her bloodied hands splayed out to catch the new-born as, with one last agonizing push, it slips out of its mother and into the world. The baby gives barely a moment for its first breath before it emits a light wail that echoes through the birthing room and begins to squirm in the midwife's hands. The child is rushed to a clay rinsing bowl filled with steaming water where it is quickly cleaned and swaddled in fresh linens.

The two other women run around the room like frantic ants exchanging the soiled sheets on the cot and assisting the mother back into a comfortable position who is just regaining her breath from the long ordeal. After waiting a few moments to catch her breath the third time mother manages to open her deep green eyes to search the small hut in the hopes of landing her sight on her newest born.

The midwife still carrying the crying child slowly moves her way back to the mother's side and gently places the crying child in her arms stating in a regretful tone "It was a girl."

The mother looks up in surprise not expecting, or understanding, the reason for the past tense wording. Isn't the child not only crying but squirming about in her arms right now? How could this woman possibly say something so untrue when the baby was obviously alive? She opens her mouth to berate the woman for such an atrocious accusation when... she feels it. That lightness that she did not experience with her first two children.

The baby in her arms was too small.

It was a runt.

The town was a very superstitious place, and if a runt was born it brought with it horrifying possibilities and endless bad luck. That is, assuming the child survived the first day. And if it did manage to survive it needed to be either removed from the town or disposed of entirely. For as the child grew so did the misfortune around it.

But the mother couldn't understand. It just wasn't possible. Both herself and her husband were very robust individuals, and as far as she knew neither her's nor her husband's family line had any records of any under weight children. Her husband was given the good graces of the gods to become the mayor for Minerva's sake! Something like this just didn't happen to them. But even as these thoughts passed through her head she looked down at the child in her arms and her mind went completely blank, and not a moment later she knew she would never be able to kill this child.

Through her musings the man, upon hearing the infant's bawling, bursts into the hut. The door hitting the wall behind it with a harsh crack from the sudden movement. "Antistia!" He cried out of joy and relief of seeing his wife alive and well, his arms outstretched to embrace her form. But when his eyes fall on the child his step falters, and the question is out of his mouth before he can stop it. "Why is it so small?"

Startled out of her thoughts from the question Antistia looked up at her husband as if he just appeared out of thin air. When the man points toward the child for explanation, however, she quickly replies saying "She's a little small right now Romulus, but she's very healthy and I'm sure she'll grow quickly to be a great woman." It's a statement meant to convince someone but even to her ears it sounds shaky and unsure. She knew her husband was never a suspicious man but even he became wary when a runt was involved.

Romulus slowly walked toward Antistia and stared at the child in her arms. His face filled with hesitation as he took in the child's condition. "Please, Romulus." Antistia softly begged her husband. He turned to look at her pleading face before sighing and giving a small smile to his wife.

"How can I deny my beautiful wife." After saying this he sits down next to her on the cot to kiss her forehead. At this small gesture Antistia relaxes on the bed knowing the possibility of death for the child has passed.

The midwife and her two assistants standing in the room all share a look of pity for the child but do not bother to correct the woman. Instead they usher themselves out of the hut to give the family privacy and leave the child to the fate they believe will befall it. As they open the door the two children still waiting outside rush in weaving their way through the women's legs and over to their mother who now holds their newest sibling. The couple looked away from the new-born to see the excited faces of their children looking up at them. "Remus, Crispina, come and meet your younger sister... um" Romulus begins but then pauses when he realizes they haven't given the child a name yet.

Noticing her husband's distress Antistia chimed in saying "Valhallarama Vipsania Vorenus." and then lowered the baby still squirming and whining to the children's eye level. Romulus looked at his wife in surprise for the choice of name but then shrugged it off deeming that a strange and unusual child should have a name just as strange and unusual. Crispina's hazel eyes widened and her face took on a look of absolute awe and wonder as she stared down at the face of her new sister, while Remus looked at the baby in a mixture of confusion and disgust. "Why's it all _pink _and _squishy_ lookin?"

A great round of laughter bursts from Romulus and Antistia willingly allowed her self a good chuckle at the remark before quickly correcting her young son. "Babies are just born looking that way Remi. When they get a little older they'll lose that color and start to grow big and strong." Remus still didn't look convinced but he didn't push the subject any further.

Though Antistia and Remus didn't realize it, their exchange planted a small seed of thought into the back of Romulus's mind that would only continue to grow as time went on. Would the child really grow as his wife said it would or would it truly turn into the most unlucky omen of all?

8 YEARS LATER

(February 26th)

Near the center of town a small girl quickly scales up the side of a building in the early hours of the morning. Leather sandals tossed and forgotten on the ground below, her tiny bared feet and nimble fingers easily find the small protruding edges and cracks in the wall that carry her higher. The light weight of her slim body only helping her ascend faster. Bright green eyes filled with determination and a hint of innocent curiosity focus on the destination visited so often by the girl, she can't remember a day that she had not known of it. As she clambered onto the shingled roof of the building, the wind, so much stronger at the higher elevation, whips at her loose waist length brown hair and billows the sand colored dress that's been bunched and tied off on the girls upper right thigh.

After steadying herself on the roof she plants her feet onto the tiles and takes a moment to look around at the buildings around her. The building she now stood on was one of the very few largely built buildings, this one just so happening to be her own home. A single paved road acted as the central nervous system for the town with small dirt paths branching off from the main road and leading to any further locations. The few people who lived there bustled about from

place too place trying to accomplish their days worth of work. Behind the home she stood on lead to the vast open fields where cotton, wheat and olives were grown in. A small stream runs along side the fields and maneuvers its way through the town before spilling into the ocean. A single water wheel, in constant rotation within this stream, acted as an energy source for the mill that worked tirelessly to prepare the food that was harvested from the fields. The girl frowned upon seeing it as a memory of an even younger version of herself came to fruition.

She had played in that very same stream that day, jumping from rock to rock and picking up random objects to see how long it would take for them to sink beneath the water. She was having a fun time with it when she saw that the water wheel was still and silent. For a moment she panicked, for not too much earlier her mother had informed her of the wheel's importance. If it wasn't moving then much-needed resources for the town would be cut short for a while. So she ran up to the wheel as fast as she could inspecting it as she went. Her little mind racing as she thought about how the movement of the water would always effect the wheel and then came to the conclusion that maybe the wheel itself just couldn't turn. So she climbed up the buckets of the water wheel until she was even with its center then proceeded to shimmy her way across the supporting beams until she could reach the location that the wheel was connected to the mill. Then she removed one of the tightening pins to allow it to move again.

What she hadn't been informed of however, was that the wheel had been stopped on purpose for repairs to be made within the mill and the center rod was not fully connected to the wheel as a safety measure. The Wheel managed one full turn, just long enough for the girl to get down, step back and admire her work, before popping off of its placement and falling, with a loud crash, onto its side and into the stream. It took 10 men and 6 hours just to place it back into position again.

Needless to say, the day did not end happily.

Shaking her head from the memory the girl turned back around and faced toward the vast amounts of roofs that lined the main road and led all the way to the docks at the ocean front. After setting her sights on her true destination, a house furthest to the right of the village that seemed to have the perfect overlook of the sea, she began her favorite pastime. Roof Hopping. As she positioned herself for her first jump she thought back to those first months of this activity and every now and again afterword where she would slip and fall from a roof, or worse, through a roof. She was much better at it now of course, but every time she had fallen it would just be her luck to topple something over, or break something, or let something loose. And each time it happened the town would be there to witness it, and if it wasn't, the few people who did see it would spread the word like wild-fire. She could almost always guarantee the mishap was known by every last individual within an hour of its happenings.

Even through all these thoughts, she managed to find a good landing location to focus on before scooting back and then sprinting to the edge of the roof. Just as the ball of her foot connected with the edge of the roof tiles she pushed off. For a few solitary moments she was in the air, her feet and legs still moving under her but touching nothing and her arms and fingers splayed out in front of her. Both

awaiting the imminent jolt that will push through them when she landed.

She hits the next roof hard and slides down ever so slightly, but her footing has experienced this many times and she knows just how to push against the shingles to get the best traction out of them. When she settles she releases an excited breath and continues onward to the other side of the roof to repeat the process with the other roofs until she reaches the last house.

Now, it wasn't necessarily the roofs themselves that excited her so much, but the altitude that they provided. Ever since she could remember she adored being in high places. The air was always that much fresher, the wind that much stronger, and though everyone called her small while she was on the ground, she always saw everyone else that much smaller when she was so much further above them. And if _that _wasn't enough, the amount of sight that the altitude gave her was absolutely breathtaking. There was just so much out there waiting to be seen, touched, and experienced. If there had been any tree's in the area she would have used those instead of the rickety old roofs that adorned the houses, but the closest ones to the area, besides the olive trees and those were off-limits, were a good ten miles inland. So the roof tops became her domain through necessity.

Today however was not about sight-seeing, as much as she enjoyed it. Today she had a specific objective on her mind, all concerning with the upcoming weather. Through her own observations and several teachings from her father she'd been able to deduce that a storm was coming, a big one. This particular roof escapade would be the one that gives her the final information on how big it's going to be and when it will get here. After landing on the final house, the girl clambered over to the side of the roof that faced toward the roaring ocean and the gusting winds. She slid down the side of the roof on her bottom until she reached the edge where she swung her bare legs down to dangle in the air, allowing her to sit perched on the edge of the roof with her hands acting as secondary anchors.

The girl's eyes scoured the sky above her searching for the specific cloud that always came as a flag in the sky before storms. Her eyes didn't bother to look above or behind her as the direction of the wind told of the storm coming from the sea. That was already a bad sign in and of itself. Because while storms seemed to shrink on land, the ones coming in from the sea were supplied with a mass amount of strength before it touched down on the soil. Even worse the wind was coming in fast, meaning the storm would be here in no more than maybe three or four days. If they were lucky. Just a few moments more of searching and there they were, Cumulonimbus clouds, just off the western horizon. And there were a lot of them. At this the girl knew this wasn't going to be just a regular storm, oh no, this was a hurricane. Those were horrendous news for the town. They ripped up the crops from the ground, forced the ships in the dock onto the land and made them useless for days until they were repaired, and finally, it flooded _everything_. All the way from the docks to past the fields everything would be at least knee-deep in water after the storm passed.

The girl released her grip from the roof so she could turn and make her way back to her house when a sharp cry came from below.

"VALHALLARAMA!"

The shouting of the name startled her so harshly she lost grip entirely on the side of the roof and, without even a second to correct her mistake, slipped off the edge. Valhallarama's fall seemed to happen in slow motion, as it always did, and she just happened to catch a quick glimpse of her elder sister standing on the ground with a look of utter horror on her face and holding a small pair of leather sandals in her right hand, _just_ before landing on the fence of a sheep pen in an upside-down heap. Now, what usually happens when someone lands on a fence is it just cracks under the person's weight, and that's that. However, Valhallarama's luck holds true as the fence not only jolts forward and into the ground from under her weight but, like a domino effect, the rest of the fence follows suit.

Half a second of silence occurs before, ... enter stage right, pure chaos. Sheep are scattering. People are running. Valhallarama is panicking and crying out "I'm sorry! I can fix this!" Crispina's shouting of "Dear GOD's!". And miscellaneous shouting's of "WHAT THE HELL?" "WHATS GOING ON?" "WHAT HAPPENED?" fill the air along with the agitated bleating of the sheep.

Crispina is the first of the two girls to react as she rushes over and picks up the scrambling Valhallarama. Being 4 years her senior and already 3 times the younger's girth, it's about as easy as lifting up a small bag of rice. After setting Valhallarama back on her feet Crispina let's go of her and says "What were you doing up there? You know dad's told you to stop climbing on buildings!" But Valhallarama payed no heed to her elder sisters scolding instead twisting around and rushing to lift the fence as quickly as she could. Crispina just stood there looking at her sister in pity as she struggled to do something that the elder sister could carry out so easily. It was like watching a bunny try to lift a fallen tree.

Meanwhile the rest of the town was beginning to gather around the scene of the crime, some holding bleating sheep under their arms and looking haphazard in their dirt covered garments, while others simply walked up with curiosity and confusion written on their faces. However, as each person took in the sight of the culprit for the mishap, each face exchanged their looks of confusion for ones that ranged anywhere between 'expected annoyance' to flat-out 'anger'.

Statements of "This is the sixth time this WEEK!" and "That runt's gonna mean our starvation if she keeps this up!" filter through the crowd and into the ears of the accused only forcing her to try to double her efforts. At that moment the crowd began parting with yells of "Make way! Make way for the mayor!" and Romulus emerged from one end of the circle of citizens, closely followed by Remus. Now a stout boy of 13 with meaty arms and shaggy hair in the same style as his father.

With a quick stride and decisive movement Romulus arrived in front of his daughters in a matter of moments. He observed the scene in front of him taking in his eldest daughters now sheepish look, sandals still in hand, along with his youngest child still struggling with the toppled fence, and then around to the people holding the captured sheep. He did all this with a slow calculated look before turning to his youngest daughter and stating in a voice as serious as the

situation around him "Valhallarama, what happened?"

Now, until then Valhallarama hadn't been paying much attention to all that was going on around her until she heard her father's voice. To which, upon hearing it, she dropped the fence from the mere 2 inches she had managed to lift it and straitened her body in response to the amount of suppressed anger that was veiled behind the words.

She dared not turn around for fear of what she knew she would see once she looked at her father's face. So she continued to look toward the pasture that extended off toward the low overhanging cliff face as she answered with "I was on the roof," a low groan escaped the crowd upon hearing this with one person even calling out 'Another roof?!' all silenced by Romulus's raised hand. Once it was quiet again Valhallarama continued saying "and I was checking the path of the storm, when Crispina startled me and I fell off the roof onto the fence." the sentence lowered in volume as Valhallarama got to the part where she had made her mistake. She knew her father wasn't happy and she already knew what was going to happen before he even said it.

"Valhallarama, look at me."

She did as she was told, slowly turning around and finding the ground suddenly interesting as she did so. Then with a large swallow she lifted her head to meet with her father's gaze.

And there it was.

The same face he gave her when she broke the water wheel, and the same face he made every other time she caused any amount of disorder to occur. It was the same look one would give someone they expected to fail at a task and was just waiting for the time when it would happen. It wasn't the first time she had received this look, but each time she received it from her father it was like an eternal knife jabbing into her heart. She truly wanted nothing more than to do something that would make this man happy. But if he continued to look at her with such hopeless expectancy, how was she supposed to accomplish such a task?

Valhallarama bowed her head in resignation and in a voice that comes out sounding like a hoarse whisper she said "I'm sorry."

Romulus took in a deep breath in before sighing and pointing toward the fence "Fix this." Then almost as an after thought he turned to his son and stated "You and your sister help her."

At this, Remus looked up at his father in indignation as he wined "Why do we always have to help clean up her messes?"

"Because I said so," Romulus countered in all seriousness "And I don't want another water wheel mishap." After stating this Romulus turned toward the crowd and said "To everyone here, I apologize for the interruption. If you are not currently in possession of a sheep please return to what you were doing before, all those holding sheep please follow me so we can place them in the barn for safe keeping until the fence has been repaired."

As the crowd cleared Crispina turned toward her siblings and sighed "Well, we might as well get started. Valhallarama there is a hammer

sitting up against that house we can use it to pound the stakes back in."

As Valhallarama left to retrieve the hammer Remus yelled after her retreating form saying "Make sure you bring a stool!" Crispina elbowed him in the ribs at this and gave him an angry look. Remus bowed from the contact before covering the assaulted area with his arms and grunting out "What? She's not tall enough to hit the post correctly without one!"

Crispina rolled her eyes at this before turning and walking toward the fallen pen and saying "Just come over here and help me pick up the damn fence."

Thus began the long activity of pounding the fence back into the ground. Crispina and Remus would both hold up the individual fence posts while Valhallarama stood on the little crate that she used as a makeshift stool and swung the hammer down on the post. It was exhausting work, at least for Valhallarama. For her, swinging a hammer came as a process. First, Valhallarama would use most, if not all, of her energy just to lift the hammer off the ground. Then, using the centrifugal force of the hammer to her advantage she would apply all the weight that she had into the movement to force the hammer into the appropriate ark so it would hit its mark. Unfortunately, this process was only a one shot deal as the vibration that the hammer gave off after coming in contact with the post would always shake it from her grip. And as it fell to the ground each time she swung, Valhallarama's body would be fighting for balance on the rickety crate taking up even more time and precious energy. When she stilled she would jump down, re-situate the crate, grab the hammer and drag it back to the crate to prepare for another swing. By the end of the second post Valhallarama was already feeling the sweat pore down her face.

After noticing her sisters distress, Crispina decided to trade places with her after every two posts, doing another four herself in quick succession and then handing the hammer back to Valhallarama. Remus refused to help any further than what he had to. This process continued down the fence until about mid-day when the three siblings stopped at about half way through their work too take a much needed break on the cool grass. Valhallarama practically collapsed on the ground from exhaustion, her limbs spread out around her as far as they could go. The wind was cool against her heated skin, and the sore muscles underneath began loosening ever so slightly from there constant usage.

After what was actually a few minutes, but felt like mere seconds to Valhallarama, she heard foot steps coming closer to her position. Refusing to force her body out of the relaxing position it was in she swiveled her head around to take in the sight of the approaching character and spotted a woman close to her thirties walking up the pathway carrying three bowls in her hand and a small pot of stew. The smell of which not only catching her attention but that of her two siblings as well who both sat up with a glimmer of hope in their eyes. "Hello!" The woman stated cheerily "Your mother heard about the accident and asked me to bring this to you. She said that you must be hungry after working so hard." As if concurring her statement a trio of stomachs all called out in a chorus of growls. The woman chuckled and she quickly handed out the three bowls to the youngsters. Remus held out his bowl first having it filled to the brim before he

quickly began to drink it down. The woman then turned to Crispina and filled her bowl to the brim as well. Crispina took a step back and thanked the woman before she began to drink the stew down as well. When Valhallarama held out her bowl to receive her share the woman tipped the pot to begin poring. Just as the stew reached the brim of the pot however it jerked back just far enough that all the remaining stew fell and landed with a small splash on the filthy ground.

Valhallarama just stood there with a stricken look on her face as the spilled stew mercilessly disappeared into the soil. She then slowly looked up at the woman with the same expression still on her face. The woman just stared down at her with contempt and said almost mockingly "Oh, pity. Maybe your mother can make you more later." and with that she quickly strode away without a second look back.

Valhallarama watched the woman's retreating form for a few moments before staring down at the empty bowl that still occupied her hands. The rumble in her stomach only made the reality of the situation that much worse. Did the town now hate her so much they didn't think she deserved to eat? The empty bowl was beginning to blur in-front of her as her eyes began to prickle and water, but before a tear managed to fall down her face a hand softly touched her arm. Valhallarama looked over and managed to blink away the moisture from her eyes to take in the sight of Crispina pouring some of the contents of her bowl into the empty one. After doing so Crispina turned to Remus and elbowed him in the side. "OW!" Remus cried before jerking his head to angrily face his sister that had assaulted his side for the second time that day "Would you stop doing that!? I'm eating here!" Crispina just pointed over to the still barely full bowl of stew being held in Valhallarama's tiny grasp. Seeing this, Remus tilted his head back and let out an over exaggerated sigh of annoyance before leaning over and pouring a little of his remaining stew into his sisters bowl.

Valhallarama looked at her two siblings with such admiration and joy for such a kind gesture, that she couldn't help the wide smile that broke out along her face as the words "Thank you." fell from her mouth. Crispina smiled back at her sister kindly and responded happily "Your welcome." While Remus gave a grunt of acknowledgment as he chugged down the last of his broth. Crispina turned to him with a mixture of disgust and disapproval for the tact of his response but decided he had already received enough physical torture for today and instead placed an arm around her younger sister saying "What are siblings for?"

And there on the grassy plain over looking the Atlantic sea, three young children happily sat next to each other. One enjoying the best stew they've ever tasted in their life.

Meanwhile, on the other end of the town, Romulus closed the gates of the barn as the last sheep was finally caught and accounted for. The crowd of civilians calling it a day as they meandered back home or to return to there work places, all save one. A tall muscular man with a clean shaven face and hair of pitch walked up behind Romulus, his sandals clapping against the ground under his weight. Once directly behind him the man stated in a rough and cracked voice "She's getting worse."

"Atticus." Was the only response given by Romulus to acknowledge the man's presence as he turned the key to the lock and pulled it to ensure it's security.

Romulus knew the man that was standing behind him quite well actually. During the time that he was a poor man Atticus was one of his closest friends, he'd even been the one to introduce him to the woman he now called his wife. He had a strong mind and a good heart and he valued Atticus's opinion greatly, but this particular topic had been brought up too many times to count and it was doing nothing more than feeding the still growing seed in his mind.

"Don't pretend to not know what's happening. You've already kept her here too long as it is. You should have killed the runt w-"

"What happens with my daughter is my business." Romulus cut him off "She is smaller than most, but she has not caused any true damage to anyone." At that he began to walk back down the street to make his rounds of the town, accounting in his mind any old cracks in buildings or roads he would later have fixed or any other miscellaneous defect of the town's property. But even at this brush away Atticus continued to follow behind him regardless. He knew he wasn't deaf.

"Alright fine, at first it was just small things like breaking a pot, or spilling a basket, but that escalated to knocking over a cart and that went to breaking roofs, then the _water wheel_ and _NOW_ she's almost gone and cost us half our live stock! At the rate she's going we'll be having people drop from sickness anytime now."

Romulus frowned at this starting to take into account all the events leading up to today that his youngest daughter had been involved in finding them quite troubling too say the least. But he still could not think of killing her, she was just a very clumsy child that hadn't grown into her muscle yet. If nothing else, Antistia would be devastated if any harm came to her. And he wouldn't be able to bring himself to look at his wife's face if he caused such a thing. But if Atticus was right what _would_ the child be a cause of later?

Noticing the conflicted look upon his friend's face Atticus sighed and stated "Look, I understand you don't want to believe it because she's yours Romulus, but whether you realize it or not the child is a runt and it's living up to its status as one. The longer you keep it here the higher chance there is of it causing harm."

Finally Romulus stopped walking to turn and stare directly into his friend's face before stating "I'm not going to kill her just because of a few mishaps. Unless something truly diabolical happens I'm not going to believe I need to get rid of her just because of some stupid wife's tale." Atticus and Romulus looked at each other for several seconds before Atticus nodded his head in resignation before waving a farewell to his long time friend and walking back down to the docks to finish with his work. He knew he had won the argument, but even as Romulus watched Atticus's retreating form, he couldn't help but wonder if he could hold true to his words.

It was now late in the day, the sun low in the sky and Valhallarama, Crispina, and Remus were striding back up the main street toward their home. The fence finished only just recently when Remus was

finally 'convinced' by Crispina to work with the hammer. He managed to finish plowing in the last of the fence posts within minutes.

Remus now walked beside his sister begrudgingly holding the three bowls in his hands, while Crispina was glaring at him from behind "Why am I the only one holding the bowls?" Remus complained.

"Because you didn't bother to help pound in the posts until I forced you too and my arms are tired because of it. I can't imagine how Valhallarama feels like right now." Crispina countered angrily.

"Oh, go cry a river!" Remus yelled back. "You know if we didn't have to fix that fence today, I would have been down at the docks with everyone else learning how to fight off raiders, or kill dragons."

"Oh, come on Remus." Crispina groaned "The closest dragon is probably a good six days sail north of here and that's barbaric viking territory. There's no reason to learn how to kill one if they don't bother to come down here anyway."

"I don't need them to come down here!" Remus stated proudly "When I'm older I'm going to sail up to the north and hunt one down myself and bring its head back as a trophy."

"Didn't you hear me numskull?" Crispina yelled as she waked her brother upside the head "That's VIKING TERRITORY! The moment they see the Roman emblem on your ship they'd kill you in an instant before you had a chance to fight back."

"I'll just kill them too!"

"No you won't there will be too many!"

"No there won't!"

"Yes there will!"

Though her older siblings were bickering angrily Valhallarama couldn't be happier. She practically skipped up the road, holding her sandals in each hand and humming a tune that her mother taught her. The dirt grinding under her feet giving them a crusty brown coating as she walked up the dirt path that marked the way up to the house. A small vegetable garden lined the front left half of the house, following a white stone wall before cutting off at solid oak door. As they traveled closer to the house Valhallarama's nose was once again assaulted by the smell of stew brewing in a pot. It had been hours since she last ate, and though she was grateful of the amount of food she received from her siblings it had still barely been a meal at all. Also, if the stew was still brewing maybe she could help her mother cook some of it, she always loved learning how to cook different foods when her mother taught her. So, with her stomach growling in anticipation and heart lifted with the thought of spending time with her mother, Valhallarama ran ahead of her siblings and grasped the brass handle of the door. Using her entire body to yank back on the door several times, she managed to open it wide enough for her to slip inside.

She ran through the entrance hallway, across the atrium*, and was about to reach for the door that led to the kitchens when it was opened from the other side by the very woman that she sot after. To late to stop and no time to turn, Valhallarama ran right into her mother so hard she flew backwards from the impact and landed flat on her back. "Oh, my goodness!" Antistia cried at the sight of her daughter now sprawled on the floor. She quickly moved too her daughters side perfectly prepared to patch up any injuries as she asked "Sweet heart are you okay?" But just as she reached out to her daughter to pick her up, Valhallarama sprang from the ground, and with a smile still plastered to her face she looked up at her mother and asked "Can I help you with making the stew?"

Antistia just stared at her daughter for a moment in utter amazement before taking in her daughters question. "Oh, I'm afraid I've already finished with making the stew for today." Antistia began but as she watched her daughters face droop she smiled and added happily "But I haven't set the table yet."

Valhallarama's mood took a one eighty turn as she beamed at her mother once more and ran toward the kitchen crying out as she went "I'll help!"

"Wait!" Valhallarama froze mid step as she looked back at her mother in alarm. "While your in there, and before you handle any bowls I suggest you clean up those hand's and feet of yours."

Relaxing out of relief of not being refused to be allowed to do something for her mother Valhallarama picked up her stride again calling back "Yes Momma."

"Remember!" Antistia called after her "One dish at a time! Don't overload yourself!"

"Yes Momma!" echoed from within the kitchen. Antistia just shook her head as she once again wondered about the bouncy material children seemed to be made of before turning to her two other children that just managed to stumble into the atrium.

"Oh good! More of mommy's little helpers! Crispina would you mind setting out the utensils? And Remus, don't give me that look young man, you go put those dishes in the wash bucket and then set up the goblets." Crispina quickly ran to the kitchen to follow out her mothers request with Remus begrudgingly following after.

With the table quickly set and feet cleaned and sandal-ed once more, the stew was served and eaten with great gusto. But even though the table was set for five, the fifth member of the family did not show for diner that night. This was actually quite usual as Romulus' position required him to work well into the evenings, sometimes even extending into the night. After dinner was finished and all tummies were completely satisfied the three children were ushered off to bed. and then Valhallarama's room being next to hers and further from the door.

Antistia then went around the atrium, visiting each of her childrens rooms. She started with Remus's room which was on the right side of the atrium and next to her and her husbands room but closer to the front door. After entering she gave him a quick kiss good night, to which he complained quite loudly about how it wasn't manly. Antistia

just chuckled at this before exiting and then moving on to Crispina's room located right on the opposite side of the atrium. When she entered her room she repeated the same action that she had given her son and Crispina responded wishing her a good night as well. Antistia then went to visit her final child whose room was right next door to Crispina's. When she entered Valhallarama's room she went up to the girl and kissed her good night but before she could leave she heard Valhallarama call out "Momma?"

Antistia turned to face her daughter now tucked under the covers of her bed in her white nightgown, her day-wear now laying haphazard in the clothes bin on the far side of her room. She had a pensive expression on her face as she stared back at the older woman. Wondering what could be wrong, Antistia answered "Yes, sweet heart?"

"Can you stay a little longer?"

The mother relaxed and smiled at this before moving over to sit next to Valhallarama on her bed. The tiny bed creaked underneath the heavy set woman and tilted with the added weight but it managed to hold steady. "Okay, but just this once." As she said this Antistia brought up her hand to play with her daughters nose by grasping it between two fingers and moving it back and forth until she began to giggle. "Now," Antistia stated after the giggling quieted down "What has my daughter so thoughtful today?"

Valhallarama looked up at her mother, opening her mouth as if to say something but then closing it as a secondary thought. Antistia waited patiently for her daughter to find the words she wanted to say until she heard Valhallarama ask "Why do people think I'm bad?"

Antistia drew her head back with a face full of confusion "I'm sorry, I don't understand. Why do you think people think your bad?"

Valhallarama sighed at this, she didn't want to have to explain the days events to her mother but she supposed she had no choice. Getting herself ready for a long talk Valhallarama scooted up in her bed until she was sitting with her back up against the head board with her pillow acting as a cushion. Once she was comfortable Valhallarama began recounting the day from the moment she was climbing up the wall and then to her big fall into the sheep fence. Then she began recounting the different reactions the towns people had to it, she refused to state her fathers reaction. Then she went on to recount the actions of the woman that brought the pot of stew.

At the mention of this Antistia stiffened, her knuckles cracking and turning white from the grip she had on the sheets. She could handle the peoples statements toward her daughter but refusing her child to have the right to eat was completely crossing the line for Antistia. And she had the audacity to come back and say she ate so much. She would be having several words with the woman tomorrow morning. "It sounds like you had a pretty ruff day." Antistia mentally patted herself on the back with her ability to get that out so calmly even through all the anger "But as for the way those people acted, I can only say that they themselves are acting out of confusion and fear."

"So," Valhallarama began slowly "People are scared of me?"

"Well not necessarily," Antistia explained "People have many fears behind them, unfortunately one of the highest fears is the fear of the unknown, or of things that they don't understand. When they have to confront these things they can have many different reactions. They can run from it out of fright, become very angry with it, or even pretend it's not there at all. But there are some very special people that actually embrace the things that are different. And by doing so they have the ability to create a different perspective on life."

"Like me and Roof hooping?" Valhallarama asked.

Antistia chuckled at the supplied example "Yes, like you and roof hoping. But these special people are so rare to regular people that they themselves are considered different or unexplainable. And thus others become afraid or angry with them because they don't understand the absolute wonder these new and unexplained things can bring about."

"Well," Valhallarama began as she took in the words of her mother "I know two people that don't do that. Crispina, and even Remus, shared their stew with me."

At this, a small spark of pride for her two older children ignited in her heart and Antistia smiled as she said with absolute truthfulness "Oh, did they now. Well that was very kind of them. I'll be sure to thank them for that."

"Don't worry about that momma," Valhallarama responded "I already did."

Antistia couldn't help the joyous laughter that came out of her at that. Mid laughter however she dissolved into a fit of coughs. Each sounding harsh and grinding as they left the mothers throat. When she could breath freely once more she smiled down at her daughters horrified face saying "It's alright, momma's just got a cough it will go away in a few days." Valhallarama relaxed at this but her face still held worry in it. Antistia decided to change the topic of the conversation before her quick witted child could ask any questions. "Well, this day might not have been your best but I bet you know what the day after tomorrow is."

Valhallarama practically shot up and beamed all the colors of the rainbow as she answered "MY BIRTHDAY!"

"That's right." Antistia said gleefully "That beautiful February 28th^, and do you know how old your going to be?"

"Eight!" Valhallarama said with pride in her voice.

"That's right!" Antistia stated mater-of-factly before playfully dropping low and dramatically putting her finger too her lips before whispering out "And I have all three of your presents ready for you." Valhallaramas green eyes widened to dinner plates and her jaw practically hit the floor at this. Normally everyone only got one present for their birthday each year. It was the rare treat to have two presents. But three, that was unheard of. Antistia chuckled at her daughters reaction before slipping off the bed and replacing her finger to her lips to emphasize the secrecy of what she just

unveiled. Valhallarama quickly copied the motion to show she had registered the meaning. Antistia then tucked her child back into bed and exited the room.

Unfortunately, through her excitement of the thought of her up coming birthday Valhallarama had completely forgotten about the up coming storm that was scheduled to happen that same day.

(February 27th)

The next morning, Valhallarama was woken up by the sunlight that streamed in through the open window of her room and landed on her face. She released a small groan before reluctantly lifting herself up from her pillow and into a sitting position using only her arms and allowing the rest of her body to stay limp. With her eyes still closed and dark brown hair sticking up at odd angles, she tossed the bed covers off of her form before swinging her legs over the side of the bed to rest on the ground. Shakily getting up onto her feet she wobbled back and forth for a few moments before releasing a yawn into the air and smacking her mouth open and closed trying to rid it of the bitter taste that always seemed to form as she slept. She then turned and ground guided herself, using her hands to feel where she was going, until she reached the other side of her bed where a small wooden desk sat with a matching chair sitting in front of it. Upon the desk was a large bowl of crystal clear water with a small brown hair brush laying on its side to the right of the bowl and a cloth towel to the left. The chair gave out a small creak as Valhallarama's body plopped into it. Her body, still half asleep, wobbled back and forth on the chair for just a moment before tipping forward, straight into the bowl of water with a splash.

Valhallarama jolted upward, gasping for air and her eyes shooting open as she cried out "I'm awake!". The water dripped down her face and hair onto her night gown as she clutched at the chair beneath her. After calming down she looked back at the now half empty bowl. The water left inside still vibrating from the sudden intrusion. Valhallarama pushed the bowl away from her and grabbed the towel to dry off her face as she mumbled to herself about easier ways to wake up. After placing the towel back down she lifted the brush and managed to tame the mop on her head enough to call it hair again. Then she proceeded to fix up her hair with trained fingers until it had two braids running across the sides of her head and connected with each other at the back before joining the rest of the hair that remained free.

After checking herself in the reflection of the water she slipped out of the night gown and meandered over to her closet which was standing on the opposite side of the room from bed and pulled open the wooden doors to sift through its contents. She picked out a light green dress that had short sleeves and reached down to her ankles. After quickly slipping the fabric over her head and closing her closet back up again she walked over to the door of her room and slid her sandals onto her feet before exiting into the atrium. Her mother wasn't out sweeping the stone floors which Valhallarama found odd but then she thought she was just out on the town getting food from the market and didn't think much more of it. She wondered if perhaps today she could go down to the docks and watch people work the rigging of the boats, but before she could move to leave, Romulus strode out of his study and when he spotted her he quickly called out "Valhallarama, I want to speak with you." Valhallarama winced at the serious tone of his

voice but followed her father back into his study regardless.

The study was an averaged size room but it felt small as the walls were lined with bookshelves filled with scrolls, stacks of parchment and the odd knickknack that adorned them. The center of the room was occupied by a large writing desk that was cluttered with papers that showed pictures of diagrams and maps. Envelopes littered over the top. The colors of their broken wax seals like tiny red paint drops splattered across the parchment. Behind the writing desk was a large ornate wooden chair with a red velvet cushion in its seat, into which Romulus sat with his hands coming up to clasp each other, his elbows resting on the cluttered writing desk. Then Romulus fixed such a piercing stare upon his daughter it could have rivaled that of the most experienced court judge.

There had never been a time were Valhallarama had ever felt smaller.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity to her, Romulus took in a deep breath and began to speak. "Valhallarama, this morning I along with several others escorted an entire flock of sheep back into a pen. This would not have had to occur if you had followed my orders and stopped your reckless actions. In light of resent events and the results of your misbehavior I am restricting your freedom to the house. You will not leave until I believe you have learned your lesson and as an added punishment you will be conducting all of the chores around the house until I say you may stop. I have already spoken with your mother about this last night so there's no getting out of it. Also you should consider yourself lucky. There is a storm coming so you won't be able to leave the house for several days anyway. Just try to think of this as a learning experience. Now, you may go." And with that as an end to the conversation Romulus waved his hand to her in a shewing motion before shuffling through the mass of papers on his desk.

Valhallarama practically deflated at every word spoken. This was horrible. Her freedom was special to her, and being stuck for too long in a single area suffocated her, at least if she didn't have good reason to stay. But that wasn't the worst part, her _birthday _was coming tomorrow, would she not be having one because of this?

"You will still be having a birthday." Romulus stated. Valhallarama jolted up too see her father still looking at his paper work. Valhallarama realized she must have accidentally said the last thought aloud, but let that embarrassment slide out of her mind as she smiled at the thought of still having her birthday, then her father spoke again. "You will just be having it here." Valhallarama's smile fell ever so slightly, but she was still happy that it wasn't canceled. She turned to leave the room believing her father had finished speaking with her when he held up a hand to stop her one more time "One more thing, I will be working from home for the next few days because of official business. I will be in my office most of the time but I will also be making sure you don't run off. Is that understood?"

"Yes daddy." Valhallarama stated before once again being given the shewing motion from her father. This time though Valhallarama quickly turned around and left the room without a second glance back.

Once outside of the study and the door securely closed behind her Valhallarama let out a sigh before leaning back against the door and sliding down to sit with her knees bent close to her body and her arms resting in her lap. She sat there for a good few minutes to take in all that had just happened. She new this wasn't as bad as it could have been but did he really have to _keep an eye on her?_ She wasn't an escaped convict. But then she came to the conclusion that if she was going to be stuck here from the storm anyway she might as well do what she's been told to pass the time. So with a small grumble she lifted herself from the ground to go and get the required cleaning materials.

First she began with the laundry, visiting each of the baskets that occupied the different bedrooms of the house. Starting with her parents room she found two baskets filled to the brim each sitting on opposite sides of the lavish bed to avoid confusion. Then she went into her brothers room. His clothes seemed to lay haphazardly across every space of floor that there was, luckily he had already left to go play at the docks so she didn't have to worry about him constantly complaining as she picked up an article of clothing he called clean but was clearly filthy. Next she went to her sisters room, her clothes all neatly placed inside the clothes bin in front of the foot of her bed. Valhallarama new she wouldn't be in her room. Crispina liked to get up even earlier than Valhallarama did so she could spend most of the mornings helping in the fields or practicing her sword play with the other children.

Valhallarama had been invited to play with them once. But, when she tried using the small sticks for swords they just felt strange in her palm, so off balance, and no mater which hand she placed it in the unoccupied hand always felt so twitchy like it needed to be included in _something_, but there just wasn't any room for it. What was worse was when she tried to hold the stick in her left hand to get a better feel for it, the other children complained about bad form and how only the right hand was supposed to be used. The hole concept confused her so thoroughly that when she was in the fighting circle she barely lasted two seconds before she was disarmed. "Don't worry about it," Crispina had told her "the sword just isn't your weapon."

"Really," Valhallarama had retorted "And what _other _weapon can I pick up?" She couldn't help but feel a little disheartened when Crispina couldn't answer her question.

Filtering away from those thoughts Valhallarama continued with removing her sisters laundry. Once she had all the soiled linens gathered in a central location of the atrium she went over to the front of the house and opened the door to the left unveiling a large supply closet. It had all types of tools, weapons, and cleaning supplies packed up against the wall. Several small wooden crates and chests, too what they contained remained a mystery to her, filled the center of the room. Manuvering around the clutter she managed to find the washing rack and the large tub that was used for cleaning linens. She dragged the supplies out to the atrium where she placed them next to the large pile of clothes.

After filling the large tub with water and poring in a generous amount of soap to be mixed, she began scrubbing at the linens until the were adequately cleaned. At each clean basket filled she proceeded to the back yard where she set the clean linens and clothes

out to dry on the line. It was a slow processes, and by the time she was almost finished the sun had already reached it's peak in the sky. When she came back in to fill up the bin one more time to finish pinning up the clean clothes, however, she found them already being carried toward her by her mother. Valhallarama stopped in her tracks before blurting out "Momma your back home."

"Well of course I am sweet heart," Antistia stated as she walked past her daughter and out into the backyard "I just had a few things to take care of this morning."

Valhallarama quickly walked up too her mother and pulled on her dress as she began pinning a large robe on the line. "Momma, you shouldn't be doing this, daddy said I was supposed to do the chores."

"That's true." Antistia said continuing with her work without stopping at her daughters words "But he never said I couldn't help." At this, Valhallarama looked up at her mother in surprise before she focused in on the cunning smile that graced her mothers face "Now, how about you go grab the broom and sweep the stone floor in the atrium."

Valhallarama smiled at this before quickly turning around to carry out her mothers orders. She ran over to the tub of soapy water dragging it back out of the house to dump the soiled water before placing it back in the closet and switching it out with the broom to begin sweeping.

In Valhallarama's hands the broom looked a little ridiculous. It was twice her height and she ended up having to hold it against her body in order to efficiently use it, it was a slow process dew to its length but she managed. It was half way into the afternoon when she was only a few paces of stone left to sweep in the atrium. It was also at this time that Remus walked in to the house. Valhallarama was so focused on her task she didn't even notice him enter the room. Remus however saw Valhallarama's ignorance to his presence and a sly smile spread across his face. He quickly left the house allowing the door to stay open as he quickly searched for a stick too use as a sword.

During his time on the docks that morning he had seen the older men practicing with their weapons and he wanted to try and repeat the different forms he had witnessed on someone who he could use as an easy dummy. He originally was going to use Crispina, but when he thought about it she was a more advanced level of an opponent than he wanted. _Not that he'd ever tell HER that._ So Valhallarama became his next best target of practice. However, through his search he ended up not finding a sturdy enough stick but did manage to find a small wooden pole that was of a descent length for him. After claiming his find he quickly snuck back into the house and through the hall. He hid behind the pillars standing in the middle of the atrium sneaking from one pillar to the next to get closer to his opponent.

During this time Valhallarama was still focusing her attention on her sweeping, but she was constantly being drawn away from her task by a small tingling in the back of her head that made her feel like she was being watched. She paused her work for just a moment in order to turn around and look at her surroundings when Remus chose that moment to pounce. He swung the post down in a long ark toward his sisters

right shoulder. Valhallarama reeled back from the oncoming attack as the wood whooshed just past her. Remus, practiced in sword fighting, took a step forward and continued the swing using the polls' momentum to swerve back toward her leg. This time however, it made contact.

Now, he wasn't intending to hit her hard, just enough to know he'd got her. After all the hit on any other child would have shook them off balance and made them wince at best. But Remus didn't bother to apply the fact that Valhallarama was much smaller, much less experienced and already caught off balance from trying to avoid the first strike. So, when it came in to contact with her leg, it hit with enough force to knock both of her legs right out from under her.

Valhallarama ended up falling flat on her back against the unforgiving stone floor, sending vibrations through her body and knocking the breath right out of her lungs. The broom, amazingly still in her hands, was lying across her torso. The leg that had been struck already felt like it had a long welt forming on it and her head was reeling from the sudden contact with the floor, she couldn't think. She only just registered that her brother now stood above her and that the wood post was now heading strait for her chest.

She didn't know what made her do it, but her body seemed to respond for her in a moment of self preservation. Both of her arms thrust outward with her hands clenched down on the broom handle about shoulder width apart. Forcing the pole to come crashing down onto the broomstick with a loud CRACK. The strength behind the blow was too much to stop completely but her body seemed to have that thought out for her as her arms swiveled the broom around, her right hand opening and pulling back to allow the pole to slide harmlessly to the ground and the left arm clenching harder and pushing forward to have the other end slam right into the side of her older brothers head. All this happened so fast that Valhallarama didn't even realize she had done it until she heard her brothers moan coming from beside her.

The broom was dropped by Valhallarama like it had spontaneously combusted in her hands when she realized what had just occurred. With her legs still in to much pain to actually use, she crawled over to her brothers current position. The sound of the two improvised weapons coming together had alerted both watchful parents and had them both come running in to the atrium, only to see the scene now displayed before them. A broomstick and a pole laying haphazard on the ground. Their son curled up on the ground, clutching his head and their youngest daughter hovering over him with a mixed look of shock, worry, and horror. Antistia gasped and ran to her son, still holding a towel in her hands that she had been using too dry dishes with. While Romulus quickly strode over to the pair, his voice booming as he yelled "WHAT HAPPENED!?" His face the very essence of rage as his eyes landed on his daughter for explanation.

"I-" Valhallarama stuttered, her voice coming out shaky after such a horrifying experience and out of fear of her fathers reaction "I-didn't m-m-mean...-he w-was- a-and I-j-just -I'm s-s-sorry!" tears were now streaming down her face and her body was shaking from the mixture of adrenalin and shock coursing through her.

"Go too your room!" Romulus yelled as he thrust his hand up to point

for emphases, but Valhallarama was too stunned from previous occurrences and couldn't bring her self to move.

"Now Romulus please!" Antistia tried to console her husband as she held her son "We don't even know what really happened!"

"Don't even know what HAPPENED!?" Romulus roared in fury and annoyance "Antistia do you not see what is in front of you? She's done something wrong again and because of it our son is laying in your arms barely conscious! What more is there to know?!"

"Romulus!" Antistia screeched, appalled by her husbands rash accusation. Gently setting her son back down on the ground she stood up too face Romulus "You know she's never done anything on purpose! It was just an accident! Stop jumping to conclus-" But that was as far as she got into defending her daughter before a harsh wave of coughing descended upon her. Romulus's eye's widened at the sight of his wife suddenly fighting for breath, but just as he reached out to her to try and calm her down Valhallarama seemed too find her ability to move in that moment and reached out for her first.

"Momma!" She cried out in fright by her mothers distress, but just as her tiny fingers rapped around the fabric of her mothers dress the coughing escalated into a torrent so harsh that Antistia doubled over.

Romulus could only stare as the reaction unfolded in front of his eyes before he reached out and grasped onto Valhallarama's wrist, tearing it away from his wife and stared at it for several moments before whispering "Atticus was right." For a moment, all was still, except for the sounds of hacking now emanating from Antistia before Romulus stated lowly "Go to your room."

"But Mo-"

"I SAID! Go! To! Your! Room! And stay in there!" He emphasized this by shoving her arm away in the direction of her room. The motion almost toppling her over before she twisted around and ran for the sanctity of her room. The last thing she saw before closing the door was her mother pulling away the towel that had covered her face during the time she was coughing and seeing a bright red splotch of blood pull away with it.

Valhallarama dared not to leave her room for the rest of the day.

February 28th

When Valhallarama had woken up the next morning she stayed laying in her bed, just staring at the ceiling. Her mind plagued by the nightmares that had occurred from last night. The sound of her father furius voice, the hacking of her mother, the sharp crack from the contacting wood, and the blood. Then, as if to spray salt on the wound, everything that she had heard afterwords once isolated in her room.

First she had heard the sound of Remus being carried into his room before Romulus guided Antistia into their bedroom to lay down until he found a doctor. The sound of the door opening and closing signaled Crispina's arrival home just before Romulus's voice came through

saying too her older sister too watch over her brother and mother and to "not let her out.". Then a little while later the sound of the doctor's shuffling and her fathers quick stride re-entered the house. After what seemed like an eternity as the two men exchanged between Remus and her parents room's, the doctor walked back out in the middle of the atrium with her father. Once there the doctor proceeded in such a low voice that Valhallarama had to concentrate too hear the few words that she did.

"Boy...bad...live...concussion...wife...intense...very ill."

Those words, though so few, meant so much and Valhallarama had never felt worse in her life. She could not understand what had happened. Just two days ago, everything was perfect. But now she could barely breath from the amount of worry she now felt in her heart for her mother and elder brother. She wanted to do so much but new she couldn't even leave the confines of her room without facing the wrath of her father. So she simply laid there drowning in her thoughts until a knock on her door startled her into consciousness. At first she believed her father was about to come in and yell about last nights events, and she shrank back against the headboard of her bed out of fear. When Crispina's form walked through the door Valhallarama relaxed from her tight position and almost opened her mouth to say how happy she was too see her when Crispina's voice cut her off. "She want's to see you."

Valhallarama stared for a moment, wishing to just rush out of the room to embrace her mother but she quickly remembered her fathers order and fear once again rooted her to the spot. "He's not out there, it's okay." Crispina consoled, noticing her sisters hesitation.

Valhallarama slowly got out of her bed before walking over to her sister who turned around and began walking across the atrium. Not knowing what else to do, Valhallarama followed her sister until she came up to their parents room. Once there Crispina opened the door and held it open for her younger sister to walk inside, before closing it behind her.

Antistia was standing just across the room, a solemn look the only thing adorning her face. She gazed out the window at the graying clouds above that were slowly sapping the light away from the day in warning of the fast approaching storm. When she noticed her youngest daughter's presence she waved for her to come closer before pointing to the bed and saying "Under there you will find a flat box with a red ribbon on it. Please, pull it out and lay it on the bed." The rasping voice that came from her mothers throat sounded so foreign to Valhallarama, compared to the majestic and noble sound she had always associated with the woman, that if she had not seen Antistia's mouth move she would not have believed her to have said it.

Not wishing for her mother to have to speak twice Valhallarama did as she was requested in as quickly a manner as she could without causing damage too the box. After she set the box on the bed Antistia rasped "Open it." Valhallarama then unwrapped the red silk ribbon from around the white box and carefully lifted the lid like it contained the most fragile things in the world. What she saw placed in the box was a small necklace with a circular wooden pendent that had the Roman empires crest of the double headed black bird engraved into its

surface. Beneath that was a type of soft sky blue cloth.

Antistia then walked over to stand next to Valhallarama before lifting up the necklace and turning it over for Valhallarama to see the other side. While one side of the pendent held the Roman Empires crest, the opposite side of the pendent depicted a dragons head with a long spiraling tail swirling into the center of the circle in a counterclockwise direction. Once Valhallarama had seen the other engraving Antistia placed the necklace over Valhallarama's head whispering very quietly "This is a pendant that was made by one of my earliest ancestors for his beloved. It has been passed down many generations. Now I pass it down too you." After placing the pendant down onto her neck Antistia grabbed the night gown Valhallarama wore and carefully began to remove the clothing. Valhallarama raised her arms to help with its removal before it was disposed of unceremoniously on the ground next to her. Next Antistia reached into the box a second time and pulled out the cloth that unfolded and revealed itself to be a small ankle length dress with short sleeves and a small golden sash that wrapped around the wearer's middle. As Antistia began to dress her daughter in the new clothing she rasped out "This is something I made for you so you could play in something your size." When Valhallarama was completely dressed she pulled out the pendent from underneath the clothing before her mother placed it back beneath the cloth. "It is a secret family heirloom," She had explained "not even your father knows I have this." And for added emphasis she placed her finger to her mouth to which Valhallarama immediately followed. Then Antistia grasped Valhallarama's hand and placed it on the underside of the golden sash. Valhallarama quickly felt a hurried stitching spot that felt like an out of place patching. Then as she felt further her tiny hands picked up a small but hard lump that was trapped inside of the stitching. Valhallarama looked up at her mother for explanation when her mother whispered out. "This is something I received many years ago. It is the diamond that your father had given to me when we had just married. It is small, but it still carries a great deal of wealth. Keep it for as long as you can until you find something very important to use it for."

After giving all three gifts to her daughter Antistia guided her over to a small stool where she had Valhallarama stand on it as she knelt down and began to brush out her hair. Once the hair was completely smooth Antistia turned Valhallarama around and kissed her on her forehead for several seconds before releasing her. Antistia held her daughters face in-between her hands, delicately grazing her thumb across Valhallarama's cheek until a little hand came up to hold on to it.

Both mother and daughter just stared at each others faces for several moments before Antistia quietly said "I love you, so much... Please, remember that."

"Of course I will momma," Valhallarama answered "I love you too."

Antistia smiled at her daughter before gently letting go of her daughters face and moving herself back to her bed. After Antistia was tucked back into her bed she looked at her daughter and she said the last words Valhallarama ever thought would come out of her mouth. "How about you go out side for a while and stay on the roof for a bit too enjoy the good weather before it leaves." Valhallarama stood in

the middle of the room just staring at her mother in shock. Only when Antistia looked up from her pillow and smiled at her daughter that she moved too go and enjoy this small moment of freedom granted too her by her mother.

As she opened the door to step out into the atrium Crispina flowed into the room carrying a tray with a steaming bowl of soup sitting at its center. Valhallarama quickly rushed passed her, down the hall, and through the door before turning and climbing up the side wall she's used so many times before. She settles down on the roof's edge to stare out at the currently vacant town before her, breathing in the air she's missed so much and relishing in the loss of her worries for just a moment. She sat there on the roof for a good hour just watching the clouds grow darker and feeling the wind get stronger.

It was just as the first rain drop fell on the roof that she noticed someone. But when she took further notice of him, she had to look hard on him to make sure she was seeing things right. The man stood just off to the side of the main street and was dressed in a simple tunic and pants that would be used for regular ware by the commoners. But what caught Valhallarama's attention was the wooden mask he wore on his face and the fact that it was staring at her. Another droplet fell on her right leg this time and she saw another person slowly make their way from behind another building wearing the exact same mask. As more drops continued to fall it seemed more masked people unveiled themselves from behind buildings, walking up the street, and coming around carts.

Every. Last. One of them. Just staring at her in complete silence. Suddenly, a great war cry emanated from somewhere within the crowd, and like a signal to begin, the entire swarm of people began sprinting toward the building yelling out and cursing into the sky. Valhallarama froze in place as the crowd continued to move toward the house until one of the people threw a rock toward her and made contact with her right shoulder.

Valhallarama cried out in pain and fright from the impact, grasping at her shoulder to ease the pain. As more rocks began to descended upon her, she shot up and swiveled on the spot to dart across the roof to the opposite side. She grabbed the edge of the roof and swung down, flinging her self through her bedroom window. She landed on the floor with a quick thump before practically running over her bed and out of her door. "MOMMA!" She screamed sprinting across the atrium. Her heart was beating in frantic rhythms from the absolute terror that washed through her. The mob now pounding on her front door with great fists. She could hear them yelling out "Kill the Runt!" "Make it pay!"

She only sprinted harder toward the door that her mother resided behind before yanking it open with all her might and darting inside. She ran to her mother's side of the bed before reaching out and grabbing the sleeve of her mother's night gown and giving it a great shake as she sobbed out "MOMMA! MOMMA Wake up! There are scary people outside! Please, they're gonna hurt me! MOMMA! Please wake up!" But her mother didn't wake up to her daughters pleading, and as she continued Valhallarama began to realize Antistia wasn't going to wake up at all. Valhallarama let go of her mothers sleeve and slowly backed away from her mothers form. Her heart breaking with each step she took until she was pressed up against the wall where she stood

frozen, staring at her mothers face. Pail and sickly, it still looked so peaceful as if she had just fallen to sleep with a good dream.

A single tear trailed down Valhallaramas stricken face and landed on the ground. Her mother was dead.

A great and powerful crash echoed through the house as the mob finally broke down the door. Valhallarama jumped from the noise but didn't remove her eyes from her mother. She kept on looking until a large man kicked down the door of the bed room, grabbed a hold of her injured shoulder, and roughly yanked her off her feet to drag her out the door.

The masked man didn't speak as he dragged her across the floor of the atrium. Valhallarama, to shocked from her mothers death, and frightened by what might happen to her, couldn't bring herself too move. She just managed to look up enough to see her elder sisters door being bared closed by two men who vibrated each time the other side was struck. Loud screeching and yelling coming from none other than her sister on the other side.

The masked man dragged her down the hall and then out the door into the escalating storm. The howling wind whipped at her hair and dress, as the rain now fell hard and fast upon her face, soaking her almost instantly. She looked up to see the mob, soaked to the bone with water dripping down the wood of their masks now crowded around the doorway and moving about as if in anticipation. Valhallarama cried out as the grip on her shoulder suddenly tightened and the nails of the man's fingers ground themselves into the soft flesh before she was ripped from the round and thrust into the sky. She hung there by her shoulder for all to see as the man held her like a great trophy. At this, the crowd yelled and roared in triumph.

Valhallarama was then carried across town in that position, each bump and jar that came from the man's walk sending a jolt of pain through her shoulder. The mob surrounded her and the man, circling them like sharks around easy prey. Finally the man turned away from the main road and began walking away from the town toward the low cliff face. As they approached, Valhallarama slowly began to see through the thick rain and notice a small boat perched at the edge of the cliff face. It looked like it would fall apart at any second. Its sail was tattered and torn from what seemed like years of sailing and the body looked like the boards were being held together by patchwork.

When they reached the edge of the overhanging ridge she had only a second to glimpse at the crashing waves just ten feet below before she was roughly thrust into the bed of the boat.

With her body shivering and her fingers beginning to go numb from the intense cold of the icy rain, she tried to get up on her feet but was held down by the man's large hand, now pressing into her back, before she could move. Then the man finally spoke in a rough voice full of command "Bring the chain!" and a person ran out from the crowd carrying a set of iron shackles.

The man then proceeded to lift Valhallarama up grasping her arm in a tight grip so as to make sure she couldn't leave. He didn't need to. For Valhallarama might as well have been considered paralyzed the moment the man's voice left his mouth. She stared at the hazel eyes that were set in concentration as he ran one end of the two foot

chain through a hole that had been carved through the mast on the boat. His thick dark brown hair, so much like hers whipping about him in the wind as he grabbed the open shackles and tightened them to a crushing pressure over Valhallarama's wrists.

"daddy?"

The word that left Valhallarama's mouth was so quiet that had he not been standing so close to her he would never have heard it over the noise of the storm. The man's mask faced her for just a moment before a work weathered hand came up to remove it revealing Romulus underneath. He glared down at her with a look of utter disgust and hatred before promptly smacking her across the face.

The strike hit her so hard she was pushed backwards from the force, she fell to the bed of the boat with her arms lifted from the ground and stretched tight by the shackles that still held firm to her wrists. She managed a gasp of pain before Romulus growled out "YOU do NOT call me that! I made a mistake years ago to let you live because I thought that it was nonsense to believe a child could do so much damage. But now," Romulus's voice seemed to falter and choke before he continued on in a pained voice "Now, you've stripped my son of his speech and you've taken my wife from this world! I made a mistake years ago and now it's time to correct it!"

Romulus went over to the back of the boat and placed his foot down on the stern before giving Valhallarama one final look and saying "Go drown in the ocean you damn runt."

With that Romulus gave a great push against the boat and it was thrust off of the cliff. The sensation of falling slowly came over Valhallarama as gravity took its course and she fell with the boat down into the raging ocean below.

TO BE CONTINUED

Oh, I'm so evil.

**Believe me I'm screaming internally too. I am so happy to finally have this chapter finished but my fingers are already itching to write the next one even as I type this out. A few small notes can be found just underneath to answer a few questions you might have.
**

*** If you want to see a diagram of the inside of the house Valhallarama and her family lived in go to this link. (I tried putting the link in as a whole but it wouldn't let me so that's why its in pieces, if you just type it out in order and exactly as it is you'll go strait to the web page)**

www.

vroma.

org

** /~bmcmanus/house.**

html

****Her house's layout is based upon what you see in the diagram but I excluded anything that went further back from the study. That's the purple 'Ta' for those who don't understand.****

****^ Yes I do understand that Valhallarama's birthday is very likely not on February the 28th but I found it a bit funny and it _might_ be used as an upcoming gag.****

****Some of this has roman culture in it, some of it doesn't. I'ts kind of a mixed mash town since it's like on the outskirts of the empire and more of an out-there, country sort of setting.****

****I also understand I gave her her book name rather than her movie name even though this is supposed to be a base off of the movie. There is a reason for this. Which will be explained in the second chapter.****

****Until next time.****

3. The Storm, and The New Life

****I own nothing.****

****HAPPY PRESIDENT'S DAY!****

****I would like to thank those who have commented on this story so far, and say how wonderful it is that people like my story.****

****I would also like to say **I had originally wanted this chapter to be longer but realized that it didn't fit the rhythm of the story I wanted. So I chopped it in two. And I'm giving you two chapters instead of just one. Sorry for the wait.*****

****Happy Reading****

The Storm, and The New Life

Thunder and lightning crashed above as the raging ocean waves roared and crashed into each other for supremacy. The rain came down like bullets from the sky as the wind tore and howled through the air. The little ragged boat was barely bobbing around in the water as waves as high as mountains tossed it about as if it were merely a toy.

Valhallarama's form was numb from the constant icy sprays of water and the unforgiving chill of the wind. The dress she now wore was tattered from the constant barrages of water and bits of her soaked hair clung to her face.

The force of each wave crashing into the boat tossed her around like a rag doll, beating her already sore and battered body against the wood. The only thing that still kept her from being thrown overboard were the chains that were attached to the mast, the shackles now digging so harshly into her wrists she could feel the harsh sting of the saltwater as it entered the now raw and lacerated skin.

The tattered sail rippled just above her head uselessly and the chains rattled against each other from the winds demanding

obedience.

Even through all this chaos happening around her Valhallarama could still hear her father's voice booming in her ears louder than even the waves that crashed around her.

"Go drown in the ocean you damn runt!"

"You damn runt!"

"Damn runt!"

Tears left her eyes to join the rain drops already streaming down her face. Valhallarama could barely breathe from the pain she felt. She'd been exiled by her own father and left out here to die. It had already been two days since the moment she'd been kicked into the sea, but she had lost sight of the land she called home not an hour after being cast. The waves had snatched up the rickety boat and thrust it into deeper waters so quickly, as if to remove any hope of being able to swim back. It must have been a miracle the waves didn't immediately smash the boat against the side of the cliff, but that didn't matter now. She'd lost everything: her home, her family, her life, everything. She had never felt so much despair in her life.

Valhallarama was thrust out of her thoughts as her little boat was struck once again by another crashing wave. The force of the impact blew the boat into the air for a moment before landing with a resounding splash back into the water. Valhallarama's body having no choice but to fall, face first, on to the deck. Valhallarama used all the strength she had left to push herself over to lay on her back. When she looked up from the boat's deck, she managed to focus just enough through the thick rain to see the waves now before her.

There were two of them, each of them easily big enough to cover her entire town, and they were both heading straight down to impact the tiny boat head on. Valhallarama had just enough time to take in a deep breath, close her eyes and wrap her hands around the chains before the two waves simultaneously impacted the boat. The boat shattered on impact and Valhallarama was thrust deep into the water.

Silence surrounded her. The pain of the impact had knocked all the wind from her lungs. She had been twisted around so many times under the water that now she was finally still, she could not begin to tell where up or down was. The water that surrounded her suspended her in the darkness that her closed eyes provided.

_This must be the end. _She thought_. But,... I didn't know dying could be so peaceful. This might not be so bad. It's better than being in pain. I'll be free, and I might even get to see Momma again. What is there to continue for? _As this thought left her head Valhallarama began to relax and allow the remaining air in her lungs to flow out of her before awaiting the expected release.

But just before the numbness could consume her body, she felt a slow tug on her wrists as she was pulled out of the stilling silence by an unknown force. She kept being pulled faster and faster, the water filtering around her and a muffled noise getting louder as she rose until she burst through the water's surface. Like a plug that was

suddenly removed, all the sounds from the storm suddenly crashed into her ears once more. She gasped in the air around her before harshly coughing up the water that had entered her lungs. Her eyes opened to see the storm's continuing battle around her. The shackles once again tugged on her wrists and she looked over to see the broken mast floating on the surface of the water, the chains still relentlessly attached.

Using the chains to pull herself over to it she wrapped her arms around the wood and clutched to it with all her might. The waves crashed around her, tossing her and the mast to and fro. But every time she was pushed under the mast always floated back to the surface pulling her along with it, almost refusing her the ability to die.

With all the chaos around her, Valhallarama's muscles shook with the effort to continue holding on to the mast that had deemed it necessary she live. Her mind fighting to stay awake through the storm.

Suddenly, it was just gone.

The waves died down, the wind settled to a whisper, and the clouds parted from the night sky.

Valhallarama slowly opened her eyes when she felt the wind calmly caressing her face. She watched as the water now carefully rocked her back and forth, as if she were in a cradle. Then, light slowly formed on the surface of the water. It colored the water around her like a never-ending kaleidoscope. Wishing desperately to know where it came from, Valhallarama strained her muscles to lift her head from the mast and look up into the sky. The sight she beheld was so beautiful she couldn't believe her eyes.

The very sky that had once held nothing but darkness was now filled with ribbons of light. They seemed to flow and shimmer like water across the sky as they changed from one color to the next. The vast amount of stars that hung above them shined brighter than she'd ever seen them before. This breathtaking view was the last thing she saw before laying her head back down on the broken mast and passing out from exhaustion.

As Valhallarama slept peacefully for the first time in almost three days, the mast was slowly pushed across the water by a sea-green snout into far more northern waters.*

(March 3rd)

A short and rather pudgy boy of about ten years, walked along the southern beach of Berk. His stubby legs kicking up sand and dirtying up his red trousers as he walked. His small four-horned helmet bouncing atop the blondish red hair on his head with each step. His face was a picture of utter boredom as he was tasked by his father to find a missing fishing net that disconnected from his boat. Apparently, he had seen it wash up on this side of the beach.

But that had been a good two hours ago, and he still hadn't found anything. Of course it couldn't have washed up on the parts of the beach that you could see everything from afar. Oh, no. It had to wash up on the narrow side of the beach where the large rock cliff faces

jutted out like huge walls making the beach sharply twist and turn around them, and making it impossible to see behind them until you were already there.

The boy sighed from his boredom and annoyance as he kicked up another patch of sand, just as the wind blew and tossed it back into his face. "GUAAGHRRR!" The boy yelled as he slammed his eyes shut from the sudden sting. He shoved his hands against his face and began to back pedal in directions unknown until his fur-booted foot hit hard against something, effectively tossing him onto his back in the sand.

The boy groaned as he slowly lifted his body from the ground to look at the object he'd tripped over. His eyes first met with a large piece of broken wood that his left foot still rested on. It looked like it had been cracked apart from a much longer object. The boy, having some recognition with the parts of a boat, quickly deduced the wood to be part of a small mast when he noticed the fist-sized hole that seemed to be carved into the middle of it. Slithering out of this hole, like a metal black snake, was a chain that ran over the wood and disappeared on the opposite side.

The boy lifted his head only a few inches more to see the chain continue on its path before finishing in a pair of shackles that clung to the wrists of a water-soaked body that lay on its stomach. Long brown hair covered the face of the person but the ripped and sand-ridden blue dress told the boy this person was a very small girl. His jaw dropped and his mind went blank for a few seconds before he shot up from his position from the ground, and without even a second glance back sprinted his way back up the beach crying out "CHIEF HALDOR! CHIEEEEEFFF HALDOOOR!"

As the boy ran away, the tide came in for just a moment to completely sweep away the large webbed and clawed footprint that had been placed in the sand only minutes before.

Valhallarama slowly awoke from dead sleep. Her brain felt fuzzy and her body was stiff and cold, but she could still feel the tight pull the chains still had on her wrists. She took in a deep breath and found her throat burning from the lack of water for three days. The thought of water had her start thinking about the ocean and how, strangely, she no longer felt the constant rock of the waves underneath her any more. Instead she felt a warm grittiness pressing against her cheek instead. As her consciousness continued to rejoin her she began to hear the waves rolling in and out of a beach just behind where she lay now, and she heard voices. They were muffled voices coming from above her, speaking in some type of garbled mess that she couldn't make out.

Then she heard the sound of wood being dragged across the ground. She felt her chains change position slightly, pulling her wrists more to the left of her body. A few seconds later and she heard a rough voice give off a grunt before a loud crack resounded from just a few feet away, and the strain of the chains quickly slackened against her wrists in response. She felt her dripping hair drag across her face as a solitary finger dragged the tresses out of the way. Her eyes scrunched tighter to try to shield them from the sunshine that now cast itself unhindered onto her face. Then a hand that was the same length as her entire torso lifted her up and twisted her around to where she was now facing up toward the blinding sunlight. She managed

to open her eyes ever so slightly when a great shadow overcast her face.

At first her sight came to her in a large blur of red, silver and yellow, before her eyes slowly began to refocus on the face that now presided above her. The first thing that caught her eyes was the beard. It was of one of the deepest colors of red she had ever seen. Not only that but it fanned out around him in a thick matted mess that extended all the way down to tickle at her skin. The entire bottom half of his face, from his nose down, was completely obscured by the amount of hair that presided on the man's face. Only a small sliver of skin showed through the thick hair to signify the presence of a bottom lip.

As the beard continued up the side of the man's face, it joined a mess of bright red hair that flowed out behind the man's head like a thick wave. Sitting on top of all this hair was a huge metal helmet, with the two largest bull horns she had ever seen sticking out from either side. Looking away from that and back down at the amount of face she could see, she noticed that the face consisted mostly of a very large nose that extended down into a long mustache. The man's cheeks peeked out from above his mustache and cradled the tiny set of blue eyes that were adorned with thick red eyebrows. As she took in the slight amount of wrinkles to his face she guessed he was about in his early- or mid-thirties.

The man was also very, very, VERY LARGE.

The largest men she had ever seen coming into the docks weren't even half this man's size. The very waist of this man was as thick as an ancient oak tree's trunk, and the yellow tunic he wore could be used as a large tent for her. The bear fur cape that adorned his back could have covered up a king-sized bed easily, and the man was built like a boulder.

She was surprised, shocked and astounded by the man's great size, but due to her lack of pure consciousness yet, her face took on a look of dazed wonder.^ Then the man began to speak. His beard seemed to move around and the sliver of skin rose, fell and twisted as he spoke. It was a strong deep voice with great command behind it even in its low volume. But the only thing she heard come out of his mouth was.

"Hvor kommer du fra?"

She just stared at him for a moment as if he had just grown a second head. After a few seconds of silence the man noticed her confusion and repeated himself.

"Hvor kommer du fra?"

When she listened to the wording a second time she knew that it wasn't Latin, but some of the words he spoke were familiar to her. "Kommer" sounded an awful lot like "come" and "fra" sounded like a mangled version of "from". From the few words she could make out, she quickly deduced he was trying to ask where she came from.

When she tried to answer him, however, her throat only emitted a small croak from the lack of water it still desperately desired. The man quickly turned to someone behind him that she couldn't see and

ordered out something that sounded like "vann!". The large man then reached out for something that was being handed to him before a small clay container was placed at her mouth. Water was graciously poured out of it and into her mouth. She quickly began swallowing it down, coughing only a few times when it was poured too fast and overflowed a few times. Even after accepting the water, her throat still refused to give more than a small crackle of voice. Having no other way to answer him Valhallarama thought for just a moment before reaching her hand up to pull out the necklace from underneath her soaked robes. It had the Roman insignia on it; if she could just show it to him then she could answer him. Her fingers wouldn't cooperate with her though and the weight of the shackles still attached to her wrists didn't help her endeavor. It took many tries to wrap her fingers around the string that still clung to her neck before she could pull it out from beneath the soaked cloth.

The large man watched her pull out the necklace and then focused his eyes hard on the pendant. It twisted out of her grasp and her hand flopped back onto the sand from the exhausting effort it put her through just to do the simple task. When it landed back down on the girl's chest, the black crest of the Roman Empire glared up at him. The man gave a deep frown toward the pendant's significance before picking it up with his free hand to study it more. As he picked it up he felt a second side to the wooden engraving. When he flipped the pendant over in his hand, he found the bright red swirling dragon insignia of his very own tribe shining up at him.

Valhallarama watched the man's face switch from displeasure to confusion and then change to deep thought as he studied the pendant. As footsteps came toward the large man from behind, he encased the pendant in his hand until it was completely covered by his massive palm before turning to listen as a voice came from behind, asking the large man a question.

"Hva er historien om jenta, Chief?"

The large man paused for a moment before speaking "Hun er en utst tt fra en ukjent land, jeg vil ta henne til gotisk for r dd f r jeg gj r noen endelige avgj relser." Then he rose from the ground taking Valhallarama with him at the same time he said "G  og spre ordet til byen at vi skal ha en bes kende for en som p enn ubestemt tidsrom."

"Ja, sjef Haldor" And with that the other man ran off to obey the order of his superior.

As the large man began to walk, with her cradled in his log-like arms, Valhallarama stared up at the man's face, thinking back to the last words spoken by the other man. She thought for a good long time as they walked across the beach until the words finally clicked in her mind and she slowly enunciated "Sssseff Hauuldoor." The man swiveled his head down to look at her, one eyebrow only slightly rising at her words before she asked again "Sjeef H-Haldoor?" Valhallarama pointed toward the man's face with her tiny finger, her chains rattling as she did so, to emphasize the meaning of the question. He gave her a calculating look, before giving a slight nod to her question and continuing his pace. She smiled knowing that was his name now and tucked the pendant underneath her clothing before contently snuggling closer to the warmth of his body.

He only said one last thing before the rest of the trip was filled with silence. "Hvis gotisk bestemmer du skal leve, minst vil du l re raskt."

Valhallarama kept her eyes closed trying to regain a little more strength. She listened to the boots that thumped with each step, as Chief Haldor carried her across wooden planks that creaked underneath his immense weight. She only opened her eyes when the Chief began to rock back and forth, to see him climbing up a massive winding staircase that was embedded in the side of a large rock spire. As her eyes followed the path of the staircase she sighted a small wooden house-like structure, perched at the very top. When she studied it closer she could see long pieces of wood jutting out from the rock spire and holding up the house like the legs on a spider.

As they climbed higher she felt the cold wind gust around her, and she shivered in her wet garments. The Chief, used to the island's cold weather, didn't even spare it a second glance before reaching the top stair and opening the wooden door leading into the house. Valhallarama peeked over the large arm that held her to see the one-roomed home.

The inside of the home was dusty and molded over in some places, and when she breathed in her nose was assaulted by burning oils and herbs that were scattered about in random places. Some of the wood planks that made up the walls were crooked in their placement which allowed sunbeams to dot the hardwood floor, a constant whistling streamed through the house as the wind slithered through the cracks.

Bookshelves and desks ran along the left side of the room, adorned with bowls and jars that were filled with miscellaneous objects ranging from sprigs of thyme, to bones, to things Valhallarama couldn't even name. Tattered old books were placed haphazardly around these objects and ancient scrolls filled in the last spaces left over.

Looking to the right of the room and closest to the door was a small bed frame made entirely of wood planks. The soft mattress filled with feathers or straw that she was used to was absent; a single stitched pillow and an old stained blanket the only two bed-clothes adorning it. In the far right corner a small fire crackled in a rock chimney. A single boiling pot, hanging by a metal rod, hovered over the flames as they licked at its dark surface. At the very back of the room a large brown curtain hung over a doorway to the outside.

Before she had the ability to look further she was quickly picked up by the Chief like a lost puppy and placed in the middle of the wood floor. Her chains rattled as they connected with the floor and a small cloud of dust puffed up making her sneeze. She looked up at the Chief in confusion, who simply turned toward the curtain in the back of the room and said "Gotisk, jeg  nsker for dine r d."

Valhallarama looked over at the curtain which was shifted over by an aged and bony hand. She saw a quick glimpse of a wooden deck that faced toward the vast ocean before an old and decrepit woman stepped through the threshold. She was dressed in a mismatch of brown and tan fur and the staff she bore was crooked and bent in odd places like it was made from a branch of a tree and never straightened. The top of

this staff, which stood about a foot above her helmet's thin curved horns, was carved into the shape of a dragon's head, its mouth open as if in a valiant roar.

The woman herself, must have been in her early sixties, as far as Valhallarama could tell, and her long graying hair was braided on each side of her head, the ends hanging in front of her and dangling just above her waist. Her stature, compared to the chief, was tiny. And if she stood up, Valhallarama would even be able to outstrip this woman in height. Her bony limbs stretched out around her near circular body, and the small hunch on her back curved her into a permanent slouch. The face of the woman looked owlsh, with the near circular shape it portrayed and the beak of a nose. The large blue eyes of the woman focused on Valhallarama as if looking through her very soul.

The Chief opened his mouth to speak but the woman held up an aged hand to silence him. The woman waddled along the floor, the wooden staff she carried in her right hand thunking on the floor as she walked. She neared one of the bookshelves and grabbed a bowl that was filled to the brim with bones. She then carried the bowl over to Valhallarama and placed it in front of her. Confused by the action, Valhallarama looked up at the woman for explanation. She only gave a small smile before gesturing toward the bowl and then holding up a single finger. Valhallarama could only assume that meant to take a bone from the small pile so she studied the bowl's contents.

Each bone inside of the bowl was completely different from the last. There were femur bones, rib bones, pieces of a cracked skull, shards from a broken pelvis, and bits of knuckle bones here and there. They weren't even all human bones. Some of them she was sure made up parts of a bird's wing. As she looked closer however, one bone seemed to stick out from all the rest. It was buried underneath some of the bones but she couldn't help but want a closer look. She reached her hand into the bowl and shuffled around the bones that were in her way, which clacked together as they were shifted, until her fingers wrapped around the desired bone and brought it up to her face to see it.

It was a tooth, a very large tooth. It was serrated on one end and smooth on the other like a snake's fangs and the curve of the tooth must have been four inches long. Before she had a chance to wonder what size the animal had to be in order to hold such a tooth, it was snatched from her hands by the old woman who then pointed toward the necklace that adorned Valhallarama's neck and gestured for her to remove it. Valhallarama hesitated at this instruction seeing as the necklace was one of the last gifts her mother would ever give to her, but as the woman continued to hold out her hand she understood that "no" wasn't going to be taken as an answer. So with great care she removed the double-sided pendant from around her neck and held it out for the woman to take.

Instead of the quick snatch that she was expecting the old woman instead gently removed the pendant from her hand as if it were a great treasure. The old woman then studied the pendant's two sides for just a moment before she wrapped the string around the tooth and tied it tight. The last thing she did was pluck three hairs from the top of Valhallarama's head, and wrapping those around the tooth as well, she waddled over to the fire and tossed it into the burning coals.

Valhallarama cried out at this and attempted to get up and run to rescue the pendant from the fire, but before she had the chance to move forward the Chief's large hand grabbed her torso and firmly held her back. Valhallarama desperately fought against his grip, but she might as well have been trying to shove over a boulder for all the progress she got from it. Suddenly a large crack echoed through the house making everyone freeze in place and look at the tooth that now lay broken in half on the coals. The heat of the fire underneath licked at the bone and burnt the hairs into the tooth like three rings of paint. The pendant, resting in the center of the two halves, slowly burned down to ashes.

A small sizzling noise came from the bone as the only warning before the entire tooth exploded inside of the fire. The old woman stared at the fire for several moments, her hand at her mouth and her grey brows scrunched together in deep thought. After a short while she turned away from the fire and grabbed a sandbag from one of the lower shelves of a bookcase. She placed the bag on the ground and ripped it open. She spread the sand over the floor before she began writing odd symbols in the dirt with the bottom of the staff.

At this gesture, the Chief promptly let go of Valhallarama and stepped toward the sand to inspect the writing as it came. At first he was the epitome of seriousness but as the figures grew in number on the sand the more surprised the Chief seemed to become. Finally, when the staff laid to rest back on the wood floor the Chief turned toward Valhallarama and studied her for a long while before the woman wiped the sand blank and restarted again. This time, she only wrote a few symbols down, to which the Chief grimaced toward but one wave from the woman and he turned around to walk out the door and close it behind him.

Valhallarama stared in confusion at where the Chief had exited only moments before. She could hear his heavy feet walking around out there, pacing back and forth. What had the woman told him that forced him to exit? Was something wrong?

"You certainly have a lot of questions on your mind, now don't you?"

Valhallarama, so used to the silence of the house, jumped and swirled around at the sudden use of speech. Her chains rattled across the ground as she turned and her eyes settled on the old woman.

"And by the look on your face," The woman smiled as she rasped "I believe I have just made more."

The woman's voice was gravely, like it had been several decades since she had last spoke a true word, and she only spoke in a whisper, as if anything louder would break whatever amount of voice she had.

"You speak Latin?" Valhallarama asked in complete astonishment.

"Of course," the woman whispered as if this were the most obvious thing in the world.

"But you only gestured toward everything and then wrote those weird things in the dirt." Valhallarama pointed toward the symbols in the

sand for evidence.

"True." The woman sighed, "but everyone knows I can speak. I can speak several languages actually, but my voice is already beginning to fade rapidly as my age grows steadily higher. So I have been writing all that I understand in runes rather than speaking. A word written is just as powerful, if not more-so, than a word spoken."

Valhallarama, finally having someone who she could understand, began to fire off every question that had been on her mind since she woke up. "Why doesn't everyone else speak like you do? They all sound like their babbling. And where is here? And why did you make the SSjeef Haldoor leave? And-"

"Enough," The old woman stated as she held her hand to cover the questioning mouth. "I will answer all your questions but you must give me the chance to speak." Valhallarama silenced at these words and the old woman removed her hand from her mouth before speaking once more. "This is an island called Berk; it is located deep in the Viking territories where the main language is Norse. The man that brought you to me is "Chief Haldor," He is the current leader of the Hooligan tribe. I made him leave because I need to tell you something that he cannot hear. But first." The woman placed a hand inside a hidden pocket of the fur vest she wore and pulled out a small thin metal rod which was about the same size as her hand. The woman then took hold of Valhallarama's left shackle and stuck the metal rod inside. She wiggled it around for a few moments before a small click emanated from the shackle and it fell to the floor with a clank. She repeated the process to its twin until it too let go. The old woman then picked up the shackles and dragged them away.

"Thank you." Valhallarama said as she massaged at the raw skin of her wrists. The old woman waddled back to her, holding bandages and alcohol, which she promptly poured on the wounds. Valhallarama gasped from the sudden pain but she was prevented from pulling away from it by the old woman's firm grip.

"It hurts now, but it will not be infected later." the woman explained before quickly bandaging the wounds. After bandaging Valhallarama's hands she quickly waddled over to the boiling pot and spooned out some of its contents into a small bowl. When she came back she handed the bowl over saying "The soup will cool in a few moments, until then be careful."

Valhallarama gratefully took the steaming bowl of soup and immediately began blowing on it to get it to cool down faster. "Now get comfortable and listen carefully," the woman said. "Because this will take a while to explain and I will not repeat myself. No questions either; everything will be explained in time."

Valhallarama quickly sat cross-legged on the floor and looked at the woman with complete concentration as she gently sipped at the soup. "I must first begin explaining by asking you what you already know. First, do you have any idea what that pendant was?"

"It was a gift from my mother." Valhallarama answered sadly.

"Yes," The old woman continued "but do you know what it

was?"

Valhallarama thought for a few moments over the last things she heard her mother tell her before slowly stating "She said it was a gift from my ancestor to his beloved."

The woman nodded her head at this "Good, your mother was right. But allow me to fill in some of the blanks. A very long time ago, about two hundred years give or take, there was a young man, a Viking, who had traveled the world seeking an answer to peace with his father. Now, this man was the third son to the last king of the Wilderwest, but he was also a runt." Valhallarama's eyes widened at this but the woman continued. "Regardless, his father was willing to make him the true heir to the throne, but the man wanted to finalize this by first creating a great peace. As he traveled, searching for followers of this peace, he met a young Roman woman who he ended up falling deeply in love with. Their love remained a secret for several years before the man finally found a solution to make peace with his father and the Vikings' greatest enemies. When he was ready to leave he made that pendant for his beloved, who at the time was heavy with child, as a promise to her that he would come back to help raise it... but he never did. You see he was going to show his father a way of life that would make everything easier for everyone, but before he could show his father the miracle he discovered however, he was betrayed by his own jealous brother. This betrayal cost the brother his banishment and your ancestor his death. The devastation of losing two sons forced the king into a great depression and he ended up causing the archipelago to once again be split apart in war. The remaining son of the king was given Chiefdom over the last of the land that the great king still possessed. The Roman woman that was left behind was heartbroken when her love did not return, but she could not bear to rid herself of the gift she received from the man she once loved, so she had the pendant passed down the generations in the hopes that one day the pendant would find its way back to her beloved."

"But-" Valhallarama began, but she was silenced by the woman's raised hand.

After a few moments of silence the woman continued, "It finally did, and Hiccup Horrendous Haddock II has returned to take his rightful place as Chief." At this the woman paused and looked knowingly at Valhallarama before a smirk formed across her face as she added "Well, almost." A look of confusion filtered across Valhallarama's face but she held her tongue from the question that wished to burst forth by instead drinking down the rest of her soup. The old woman smiled at this as she said, "I see you learn quickly; that is good. For that I will explain only a little further, then the rest you must figure out in time." The old woman took in a deep breath before she continued. "The current Chief of the Hooligan tribe, Chief Haldor and his son Stoick are the last surviving members of the succeeding son's bloodline. However, they are only holding the true Chief's place until he can return anew. You will be very important in his arrival."

Valhallarama was still very confused by this statement. Would she be the one who would find this man? And if she was, where was he? And what did she have to do with bringing him back to the Hooligan tribe? She quickly silenced her thoughts however, as the old woman began once again. "As you watched me before, I have told Chief Haldor that you would be absolutely necessary for the next Chief to come to

fruition in the Hooligan tribe, though I did not tell him how. Never-the-less he knows that you are not to be killed or removed from the island. However, I cannot say the same for the rest of the tribe."

Valhallarama couldn't help the nervousness that crawled through her at those words. The woman sighed and stood before going over to a small wooden chest with the Berk crest on the front before pulling out a tan, long sleeved tunic, a pair of thin light-brown fur boots, red and brown leggings and a small fur waist wrap. She then placed the clothes down in front of Valhallarama before stating, "Dress." Valhallarama quickly did as she was told. She first carefully removed the soaked dress before folding it and placing it on the ground. As she picked up the different pieces of clothing the older woman helped lead her through the proper location that everything was supposed to go until she had all items of clothing effectively placed on her body. When she bent down to lift up her dress from the ground she froze at not seeing it where she had placed it, she looked around the entire floor to see if she had misplaced it when the old woman tugged on her tunic's sleeve. Valhallarama twisted around and saw the clothing now sitting in the small wooden chest before it was closed and then placed in her arms.

"You will need these for later times, but for now keep them close." As the wooden box was placed in Valhallarama's hands the woman held on to it yielding it's betrothal until Valhallarama looked up to face the woman's now serious face "As long as you remain on this island your Roman blood must remain a secret. Even your true name must be unknown to the mouths of others. Speak it once now."

At first Valhallarama's mouth refused to move but as she looked into the unrelenting stare of the woman it slipped out almost effortlessly, like the woman herself was drawing it from her very soul. "Valhallarama Vipsania Vorenus"

The moment it left her lips she almost felt the words remove themselves from her presence as the woman stated, "Good, your new name shall be Valka. Now say it."

"I am Valka." And the moment those words left her mouth so did the last feeling of connection to her true name.

The old woman stroked her cheek one time before she said "From this moment on you will not speak a word unless it is in Norse tongue. Now go outside where you will find the Chief waiting. He will be the one who directs you to where you need to go next." And with that she removed her hand from Valka's cheek and turned away to walk out of the back of the room. Valka stood there for only a moment longer to stare at the curtain the woman had disappeared behind before she too turned and walked out from the opposite side. Leaving the last whispers of her origins inside of the room.

When she quietly shut the door behind her by pushing against it with her back, she was surprised to notice the sun slowly beginning to descend into the horizon. She hadn't realized exactly how long she had been in there. When she looked around she spied Chief Haldor standing just to the left of the door, a serious expression adorning his face. When the Chief seemed not to notice her presence she cleared her throat to exploit it. The Chief didn't move from his position but his eyes swiveled in his head to land on her. He eyed

the box she held and raised a brow at the attire that she wore, but he dismissed it quickly before huffing out "komme" and strode away. Valka recognized this word from before and quickly followed the man back down the stairs.

They walked in silence maneuvering their way down the stairs as the wind blew around them. Valka had to almost jog to keep up with the Chief's great stride. Before she had been nearly half dead and didn't bother to look up at the view. This time she chose to take a good look at the island in front of her. It was magnificent. It rose from the sea like a great tower. Mountains scaled most of the inner island with sharp peaks that seemed to scrape at the lowest clouds. Hills rolled off of the mountains in great waves and stretched out to the edges of the island where a mottling of cliffs and beaches bordered the island. Cracks and crevices seemed to be scattered across the island like scars. Finally a forest of the largest trees she had ever seen blanketed nearly the entire central island. It was so different from the flat plains she was used to.

The village itself sat on an out cropping of the island that was separated from the mainland by a huge crevasse that disappeared into the sea below. A single bridge acting as a link between the two. The large wooden houses seemed to cling to any flat portion of the secondary island they could find. Some sitting so close to the edges of drop-offs that wooden walkways jutted out from in front of the house doorways to make entry possible. Thick grass covered the ground where dirt roads didn't preside, and sheep seemed to wander about as they pleased feeding off the large expanse of foliage. Like her town the village of Berk seemed to have a single main road that started near the top of the secondary island as a big loop and then ran down the steep slopes, swerving around the miscellaneous houses, before it ended at a large cliff face. A large switchback wooden pathway then finished the journey down into the docks.

She hadn't realized she'd stopped moving until Chief Haldor cleared his throat loudly. She almost jumped out of her skin from the sudden noise and began to nearly sprint her way down the staircase to his location. In her musings the Chief had managed to go half way down the staircase before he had noticed she wasn't following him. Valka managed to run all the way down to his location without falling over the side. There were a few stumbles but they were luckily steered toward the cliff face of the rock spire rather than the endless drop into the ocean.

The Chief only glowered at her when she had finally caught up to him but he turned around and continued leading her down the staircase and onto the dirt pathway that led toward the village. They walked up the slopes of the roads, passing by several buildings. Many of them adorned with the heads of dragons or wooden carvings of Vikings holding a menagerie of weapons and all bearing faces of war. The Chief led her a little ways longer through the throng of buildings until he approached a large wooden and stone structure. Weapons ranging from long swords, to maces, to shields, hung from the outside walls and were piled inside of a massive cart just outside the doorway. As they approached, the sound of a burning furnace met her ears and the air around them already picked up a few degrees. Valka deduced that this must be the smithy.

The window to the right of the thick wooden door had its shutters spread wide open allowing a large amount of light and heat from

inside to escape into the cooling air. The Chief opened the door and a gust of hot air burst out from behind it as he stepped inside, Valka quickly following. Once inside Valka took a look around the large room. To the far right of the room sat a large grinding wheel with several weapons propped against the wall next to it for later work. To the left of that a large pounding platform sat on the floor like a large tree stump jutting from the ground. Looking further to the left she found the blazing coal furnace, its bellows sitting in extended wait to burst another round of air to feed the already scorching flames. A single large wooden table occupied the center of the room where several different bent, broken and misshapen weapons laid in waiting to be fixed. A small clanking sound came from above her head and she quickly looked up to find a menagerie of tools hanging from the ceiling by hooks, slowly drifting back and forth in their placements.

The clanking sound had come from the Chief's massive helmet accidentally making contact with one of the tools. It swung in its place on the hook and almost looked as if it might fall off, but it was caught by a gloved hand which was attached to a barrel-chested man with a sharp black beard and long hair that was tied back in a low ponytail. He was a good foot shorter than the Chief and only about 2/3 his girth but he still towered over Valka easily. The blacksmith's hazel eyes were focused on the Chief in a moment of annoyance before they seemed to recognized the face of his leader and widened into a look of surprise

"Chief Haldor!" The man exclaimed. He finished steadying the tool and took a quick step back, "var jeg ikke forventer Å¥ 'come' her sÅ¥ sent."

"Jeg tok du lÅ¥rling 'Garth', mÅ¥ du holde et Å¥,ye 'her' mens hun er i landsbyen."

The man seemed taken aback by the statement for a moment. Then he looked down at Valka and sized her up, noting what little size she had. His eyes filled with a distasteful expression as if she were a piece of trash that got swept in his door, and his face showed nothing but disdain. Valka shrank back a step trying to decrease her size as much as possible under his gaze when he said in a low growl, "Dette er utstÅ¥tt?" She didn't know what that meant but it most certainly didn't sound like a compliment.

"Ja, Jeg trenger Å¥ hjelpe meg Å¥ holde et Å¥,ye pÅ¥ henne." Not two seconds after the Chief stated this, the conversation transformed into a battle of shouts and a scramble of babbling words that Valka couldn't make out. She shrank up against the wall in preparation for the two giants to start fighting but the argument only ended in a long glare between the two men before the blacksmith named Garth threw up his hands and yelled, "Fin! Men jeg ikke tar vare pÅ¥ henne. Hun Å¥nsker Å¥ leve hun gjÅ¥r det selv."

And with that the blacksmith twisted around and lifted up one of the hammers that were strewn on the table before going over to the furnace and yanking out a red-hot sword. Chief Haldor sighed and said "Takk Garth" The blacksmith did nothing more than grunt as he began to pound on the hot metal. The Chief stood there for only a moment longer before he turned around and opened the door to the night air. Valka turned to follow him but he put up a hand to halt her. "Bo." was the only word he spoke before backing out the door once more.

When Valka took another step he halted her again emphasizing "_Bo_." Valka finally took to the meaning of the word and stayed in the hot smithy as the Chief walked back out the door and closed it behind himself.

Valka stood there for a few moments trying to even her breathing after being left in the smithy with a man who obviously saw her as a nuisance.

"Hey, come here." Garth stated. Valka was overjoyed he used a set of words she could understand and quickly rushed to his side. She looked up at his grim face in apprehension before he began to walk over to the grinding stone, waving his hand for her to follow. He picked up one of the dull swords that were propped up on the wall and held it in front of her.

"Sverd" he said.

"Sverd." She repeated pointing to the sword for emphasis.

He merely grunted before turning around and sitting on the stool next to the grinding stone before pressing down on the small pedal underneath. When the wheel began turning he placed the sword down on the wheel. Sparks flew from the stone and a harsh grinding sound emanated from the contact between the two materials making Valka wince but she managed to hear Garth say, "skjerpe." before he removed the sword from the stone and looked at her.

"Skjerpe." Valka quickly repeated before putting the two words together and repeating them "Skjerpe sverd. Skjerpe sverd. 'Sharpen sword'." The man did nothing more than grunt again before handing the sword over to Valka, who balked under its weight for a moment, and then walking back over to the pounding platform to resume his normal work. Valka slowly propped herself up on the stool and repeated the process that Garth had displayed. She missed a few times but managed to only drop the sword on the first try from the startle of the unexpected vibration. Garth only looked up to observe her for a moment before continuing pounding on the sword and placing it in the cold water of a large barrel, the water hissing from the contact.

On the fifth try she managed to hold the weapon in a good position to sharpen it properly. As she slowly made her way through the stack of swords on the wall she began to hope maybe the life she would be living now on Berk might not be so bad.

If only she knew.

***I am basing this part of off the statement in Riders of berk episode 3 "Animal House" how dragons use their natural instincts to protect people. In this case a Scauldron is pushing Valhallarama(now newly dubbed Valka) across the water to the nearest strip of land.**

^If you look up Stoick's father, I am basing him off of the shield picture they have of him in riders of berk "Portrait of Hiccup as a Buff Man."

The language I'm using for the Vikings is Norwegian. (couldn't find Norse, sorry)This is what they are saying in order from first said to last.

"Where are you From?"

"Water!"

"What is the story of the girl, Chief?"

"She is an outcast from an unknown country, I want to take her to Gothi for advice before I make any final decisions.

Go and spread word to the village that we will be having a visitor for an, as of yet, undetermined length of time.

"Yes Chief Haldor."

"If Gothi decides you should live, at least you will learn quickly."

"Gothi, I wish for your counsel."

"come"

"Chief Haldor, I wasn't expecting you to come here this late."

"I brought you an apprentice, make sure you keep an eye on her while she's in the village."

"This is the Outcast?"

"Yes, I need you to help me keep an eye on her."

"Fine! But I'm not taking care of her. She wants to live she's doing it herself."

"Thank you, Garth."

"Stay." "_Stay_"_>

"Hey, come here"

"Sword."

"Sharpen."

If you want a better size reference for the size of the chest look at the episode of Riders of Berk where they go to breakneck bog. The chest that held the gift of hiccup's mother is the same size.

Just so people know Valka, in this story, was born on a leap year so since she is 8 years old now this current year is a leap year.

4. The Chase, and the First Friend

I own nothing.

The Chase and the First Friend

(4 years later)

Valka slowly scaled the hill that led to the village's well. The empty buckets held in her shaky grip, swinging to the sway in her walk and bumping harshly into the meager flesh on her legs. The clothes she wore barely clung to the continuously shrinking flesh underneath. Daylight shined down on dim green eyes that held dark bags underneath from an extensive amount of time without a full night's sleep. Her thick brown hair was tied into two matted braids that clung to the stretched skin that held on to a shrunken face. The skin decorated in a mottling of bruises, both young and old, which extended down underneath.

As she traveled, she silently maneuvered her way around people going about their daily lives, tuning out the small whispers that always crept into her ears even long after being able to understand what the hushed babbling meant. She lost her drive to care a long time ago anyway, so long as it was only whispers she could easily just continue on with her day as if nothing happened.

She preferred it that way anyway.

The village was nothing more than a torture chamber to her and the island was the cell she couldn't escape. Chief Haldor was like her warden, constantly checking her whereabouts each day that whole first year, and Garth was nothing more than the man who held the figurative chain to keep her in line. Each time she took a step in the wrong direction, even through accident, it would be met with cruel retribution. The adults that lived there moved around her as if she was a ghost, only acknowledging her presence for a few moments to say the off comment to their fellows and look at her in distaste before moving about their lives. This was simple avoid and evade measures to ensure a peaceful day. It was a similar concept during the night a well, but instead of avoiding people, she avoided dragons during the Raids.

Raids were a once every other night occurrence, and she would spend it inside of the forge working double time with Garth yelling out orders in rapid succession. She would be in constant turmoil, trying not to anger Garth more than he already was and trying to ignore the constant sounds of loud roars and yells of the battle raging outside. It was during these jarring and frightening ordeals that she strangely learned the most words from Garth, and the people that repeated their wishes in great yells just outside the service windows.

She remembered being so gullible those first few days of true speech when the incomprehensible babbling had slowly transformed into words of meaning. She was so happy to learn how to speak to those around her that she had gone up to so many people trying to start conversations with them, but they either shrank away from her or yelled at her to leave. Some of them even chucked objects at her.

The adolescents were far more brutal. They teased her for her lack of speech comprehension, tormented her daily for her tiny stature, and segregated her for her outcast status. They found joy in relieving her of any food substance she managed to get her hands on and she

wasn't fast enough to get to a safe location, and they seemed to take turns throughout the day to chase her through the streets. She dared not provoke them or even be seen stepping within ten feet of them. For each time she was caught by one of them in broad daylight she had to run and climb for her own self preservation. It was nothing more than a huge game of cat and mouse that happened at least once every day; twice, if the boys were just angry that day and wanted to let off steam. They seemed to have found enjoyment in using her as a personal punching bag.

Out of all others, they were her tormentors.

One of the many times she had been chased she had discovered that while she had the innate ability to climb the other children did not. This worked very well when it came to the trees in the forest. It was so peaceful there, and she would even find a fruit or two on an odd branch that she would always save for her most food-deprived times. She had even managed to build a small tree house in one of the older trees where she now slept during the nights and kept her things.

She could only stay for so long however, for the first time she refused to leave the safety of her tree the Chief himself had wandered into the forest and would have ripped the tree out from its very roots had she not come down. She could still remember the iron grip on her arm as he had dragged her back to the village. Even though he had stopped checking on her whereabouts years ago, she still feared not being seen by him at least once every few days to show him he needn't do that again. It is only for this reason she continued to come back to the village.

She thought about leaving several times but found she couldn't even get near the ships without the adults yelling at her. She had even gone so far as to ask Garth if he could explain.

"Why, if no one wants me here, will they not allow me to leave?" She had asked as she flipped the blade that was being pounded on by the Blacksmith.

He had only answered "You are considered a prisoner here until you have the right as an adult to leave this place. Try it again when your eighteen, you'll get better results." And with that said he had shoved her away toward the cooling barrel, and she knew that the extent of his patience for the day had been used.

Now, at the age of twelve, with food denied from her and sleep almost nonexistent in her constant work or flight life, she barely hoped she could survive to eighteen years old. And then there was her Roman secret. As she dipped the buckets into the water she couldn't help but shiver at the thought of what the village would do to her if they figured that out. The village might demand for her immediate execution in possibly the most horrifying ways imaginable. A vision of the Chief holding her up to be swallowed whole by a dragon's huge maw filled her thoughts at that.

She shook her head from the frightening image of the gargantuan Chief and the beastly creature before shakily picking up the now-filled buckets and sluggishly making her way back down the hill toward the smithy. Garth wouldn't be happy with how much time it had already taken her to get the buckets of water, but he was currently dining at the great hall for his lunch. If she managed to get back before he

did, he'd be none the wiser.

At this thought she quickened her pace down the hill. She might even arrive in time to take a quick break for some much needed sleep. She was so wrapped up in her thought process to get back to the forge she hadn't paid attention to the amount of steps she was going when she took a step and had it fall further down than what she had expected when she hit the beginning of a staircase.

She quickly let go of the buckets, allowing them to continue their journey forward, and juttied her hands out in a practiced motion to catch herself before she face-planted into the staircase just underneath. When her hands clenched down on the wooden plank below her, the downward motion combined with the forward momentum forced her legs to lift up behind her and begin to fall forward without her. In response she pushed off of the staircase. Hoping to at least fall on the flat surface of the ground rather than the sharp edges of the wood. Miraculously however, she managed to shakily land on both her feet at the bottom of the staircase unharmed.

She stood there in momentary shock and surprise at what she accomplished before she was jarred back into reality by an enraged yell. She focused on four boys in front of her. Three of them dry, but the one in the middle, obviously the leader, was soaked to the bone in water with one of the wooden buckets perched atop his head like a hat. The water was practically steaming off of his bright red face from the amount of anger coursing through him.

They both stared at each other for a moment and she managed to have enough time to recognize this boy for a second and slowly recalled his name being similar to an insult. Spot loit? No, no... Spitelout! Yep, that was it! The village's second in line to the Chief's position and the village showoff. He would openly gloat about how many times he won the thawfest games and he constantly paraded his medals around to show them off. He was also the highest on her bully list, due to him seeking her out as the perfect practice dummy for his art of ridicule. Of course, this time wouldn't be ending in just ridicule.

"GET THAT RUNT!"

And with that said she sprinted off like a flash, the group of boys hot on her heels. She sprinted up the steps two at a time and pushed her feet hard against the dirt road to push her faster as adrenaline rushed through her body to aid her escape. She sprinted past houses and through alleyways making as many sharp turns as she could to throw them off. She ran under objects and dogged around people through the streets using her small form to her advantage, but they still pursued her like hounds on a rabbit.

After so many of these chases her legs were running in second nature to her now, but even with all this she could still feel the meaty finger tips grasping at the air just behind her. She couldn't speed up any faster, she didn't have the energy, and she needed to get to a safe place quick or she would begin to slow. She couldn't just start climbing though; she needed time to get up before they grabbed at a low hanging limb. She needed energy, and she was losing it fast.

As she sprinted through the people-filled streets, a large wheelbarrow being rolled along by a large bald man traveled in her

fleeing direction. She sprinted harder toward him and quickly jumped inside the wheelbarrow. The man stopped in surprise at the sudden action, but she didn't pause for more than a moment before she ran up the wheelbarrow's handle, across his extended arm and then leapt off of his shoulder toward the nearest building.

She spread her arms and hands out wide, her very fingertips stretching out to catch even a single piece of wood that jutted from the house. Her chest hit hard against the very edge of the roof and she felt a long bruise come forth from the impact. Her arms splayed out over the steep roof and her fingernails scraped against the wood to keep her grip as she kicked at the wood beneath her to find some purchase so she could push herself up. Just as she managed to find a decent supporting edge in the wood, a meaty hand grabbed hold of her right leg and ripped her from the safety of the roof, allowing her to fall down to the earth.

She opened her eyes and saw the four grinning boys before Spitelout picked her up by her collar and lifted her to his eye level. Her toes barely touched the ground beneath her as she shut her eyes and braced herself for impact. The punch hit her face like a solid rock making her head swirl before she was roughly shoved away. She stumbled back for a few passes before she was shoved again from behind pushing her back forward into a fist that rammed into her stomach. She dropped to the ground and gagged but nothing more than air removed itself from her empty stomach before she fell over into the dirt and curled up into a ball. Laughing, kicking, jabbing, punching, spitting. It all came at once, and she couldn't do anything but hope they finished or got tired soon. She covered her ears in an effort to at least muffle the laughter around her.

"HEY!"

The barrage against her body stopped at the new voice's intrusion. Spitelout answered the call in a sneering voice but her ears were ringing and her head was still spinning so much she could only hear the muffled sounds of an angry female voice. Both Spitelout and the girl seemed to argue for only a few moments before a loud yelp broke through her barrier over her ears. The vibrations from the ground indicated the three boys from around her left in a hurry. She allowed herself to relax just enough to remove her hands from her ears.

A loud thunk coming from in front of her face jarred her eyes open. She came face-to-face with her reflection that rested on a well-polished, but extremely dull double-bladed ax head. Her sight slowly traveled up the cracked wood of the ax handle, noting the leather grip's tattered and worn appearance as a symbol of near constant use. Perched at the peak of the handle was the hand of a girl.

The hand's thin fingers were crowned with calloused knuckles, and tiny scratch marks decorated the skin all the way to its wrist. Dark brown training tape was wrapped tightly around the edge of the wrist, extending across the forearm and ending at a weathered and beat elbow. A lean muscled upper arm extended like a bridge to a shirt that looked like it was put together with all the different colors of brown yarn available. The first hand's twin rested on a cocked hip which was adorned with a simple leather stripped skirt which extended down to the girl's knees. A pair of ripped leggings ran down the girl's calves and disappeared into a pair of muddy brown fur

boots.

"Get up." the girl ordered suddenly, Valka's eyes immediately focused on the face of the girl which was glaring down at her with hazel eyes. Blond tresses that strayed from the low-hanging bun fell in the girl's face. Thin lips formed a light frown which pulled at high cheekbones. A single plain leather band wrapped around the crown of the girl's head, resting just above her golden eyebrows. The girl looked no older than Valka.

When she opened her mouth to repeat herself Valka responded to her by asking, "What's the point of rising when you'll just be pushed back down?"

The frustration from the girl's face vanished and her eyebrows rose at the question. Once the initial surprise from the question wore off the girl stated, "The point in rising is to turn around and punch the son of a half troll that pushed you down in the face." As if this were the most obvious thing in the world.

"Yes, because I could do that." Valka responded, sarcasm dripping from each word.

"Get up, or I'm cutting your head off." the girl growled.

Valka tensed for a moment before she shifted her sight back to the ax head and sighed "It's too dull."

"...What?"

"Your ax is too dull."

"What do you mean it's too dull?" the girl asked angrily.

"Just that." Valka stated simply. "No matter how good an ax maiden you may be you cannot cut off a person's head if you neglect your ax's condition."

No sooner had the words left her mouth, than Valka was grasped hard around her upper arm and yanked to her feet as the girl yelled out "YOU-". She didn't hear what the girl was going to call her though. The moment the girl lifted Valka off her feet, the iron grip was ripped away as if Valka had caught fire and the girl's sentence was silenced with wide eyed shock.

Valka struggled for a moment to stay on her feet after the quick jar to her body and ground her teeth together so she wouldn't cry out from the pain created in her shoulder by the vicious yank. Once she managed to still herself, Valka looked at the girl whose hazel eyes, now level with her green ones, were wide and staring at Valka's form. "Forget getting up. How do you stand? Hell! When was the last time you ate?" The girl asked in horrid astonishment as she took in the bone-thin girl in front of her. To the girl, Valka's legs were vibrating so much under the strain of holding up her body weight that they looked like they might collapse at any moment.

"Sheer force of will," Valka responded simply, "And I can't remember; it varies every week." The girl's eyes widened further at this but managed to pull her eyes away from the emaciated body and look at Valka's face.

She stared at her for several moments, her face a mix between anger and deep thought as her fingers twisted around the ax handle. "I can fix it for you if you want." Valka stated simply.

The girl's grip tightened around the wood and her face flew into an expression of shock before she looked away from Valka "I can't have you do that."

"Why not?"

The girl growled for a moment in frustration before turning back to Valka and saying "Because, nobody just gives things away around here like that."

"I'm not giving anything away." Valka said simply "I'm thanking you."

"For what?" the girl asked, confused.

"For not just standing by and watching."

Any presence of harsh emotion that presided on the girl's face practically melted at those words. "I wasn't," she started slowly before sighing and wiping the stray tresses from her face. "It just sickens me when people have to gang up on someone half their own size to boost their ego. It's dishonorable, it's cowardly, and they don't deserve to call themselves Vikings." The girl took in a deep breath as if preparing to admit something horrible before finishing, "I didn't do it for you."

"All the better reason to thank you."

The girl's mouth dropped in astonishment for just a moment before it was quickly shut. She looked down at her ax for a moment as if to study it before looking back up at Valka and asking "You're that girl who works with Garth in the forge aren't you?" Valka just nodded her head. "Are you sure you know how to sharpen an ax?"

"Do you know how to wield one?" Valka asked in return, and when the girl was about to open her mouth to retort Valka finished saying, "Both these questions are completely redundant and end in the same answer."

The girl looked at her for a moment before swinging her ax onto her shoulder and gesturing down the street as she said "Well, lead the way."

Valka turned and began to walk down the street back toward the smithy with the girl following close behind her. After only a short distance the girl looked at Valka and asked, "So, what'd you do that pissed off Spitelout so much?"

"I accidentally spilled water on him." Valka answered.

"He should have thanked you." The girl laughed "He's needed a bath all month." Valka would have laughed along with her had she not remembered what water exactly she had doused him with. Valka groaned and smacked her head for forgetting her task. "What's the matter with you?" The girl asked.

"The buckets," Valka groaned "I was supposed to get them filled with water and bring them back but I dumped them on Spitelout's head, and now Garth's probably left the great hall already and is really angry I haven't gotten it done yet."

"I can do it."

Valka's head shot out of her hands at this and looked at the girl in utter shock "I'm sorry. I don't think I heard you right; could you repeat that?"

The girl huffed and swung her ax around to bounce it against her foot. "I said I can do it. You're giving me a free ax sharpening, the least I can do is get you the water you need to do your job. Also, Garth is still up at the great hall having a drinking contest with Barsquall. I was coming from there when I found you." At this she flipped the ax back up on to her shoulder and asked "So, where are the buckets?"

"There at the bottom of the wooden staircase that leads to the working circle of the village."

The girl thought for a moment before saying "That's almost right next to the smithy isn't it?"

Valka just hung her head at this as she thought how close to her destination she'd been. She felt like she might sob as a sighing "Yes" left her mouth.

"Okay," the girl responded as she flipped her ax off of her shoulder and held it out in front of her. "Hold this for a moment." Valka held out her hands and the ax was dropped into her arms, which promptly dropped to the ground.

Valka strained groaned and heaved with all her might to lift the ax from the ground, she managed to lift it up just long enough to fall backwards onto the ground with it in her arms. Valka groaned and managed to sit up with it in her lap. She sighed for a moment before looking at the now worried face of the girl and said "I assure you I will not move it from this spot."

The girl shifted back and forth for a moment as if rethinking her previous action before stating "I'm going to be right back." And with that she turned around and sprinted off to get the buckets. True to her word, only a few minutes later did Valka see the girl sprint past her with the buckets in her hands and travel up to the well where she filled them and carried them back down the hill to Valka's position. The girl set the buckets down in front of her and then lifted the ax from Valka's lap as she stated "I assume you can carry the buckets?" Valka nodded her head as she shakily got to her feet and reached for the buckets. She vibrated for just a moment as she lifted them but managed to still herself when she was standing straight. Valka took a deep breath and continued on her way to the smithy with the girl following after.

It was all so strange; Valka had never met someone who was this willing to be nice to her. As she thought further into it she knew that the girl had only stopped the fight due to her own personal morals, and the reason she got the buckets was to pay back the favor

of having her ax sharpened. But to Valka it almost didn't matter. She supposed she could at least enjoy this fleeting moment of kindness for as long as it lasted.

The two walked together in silence until they reached the smithy where Valka put down the buckets to open the door but found the door already propped open by the girl's foot. Valka quickly walked inside with the buckets and went over to the cooling barrel where she promptly poured the water in to fill it back to the top. Once finished she walked over to the grinding stone and sat down on the stool before looking over at the girl and saying "I can take the ax now." The girl looked at her warily but Valka simply held her arms out and said "As long as I'm sitting with it I'm not going to drop it." The girl walked over to her and carefully laid the ax in Valka's arms. Once again the weight of the ax forced Valka's arms down, but having more experience with its weight she managed not to let it fall to the ground and instead maneuvered it so it lay down in her lap.

She studied the edges of the ax and how they curved in a half moon shape to get a bearing on how she would need to angle the ax so it could receive the optimum sharpening. It was duller than she had originally thought. It would take a while before she had it completed "You might want to get comfortable; it could take a while," she stated to the girl. Upon hearing this the girl walked over to the spare waiting chair and sat down with her head propped up on her hand. Valka took this as a signal to begin so she placed the ax head on the grinder and started sharpening. She had to constantly curve the blade so she didn't create a split in the surface and every now and again she had to stop and flip it over to prevent it from sharpening lopsided. When she had removed the ax head for the final time, about thirty minutes later, she looked around the room to see the girl no longer in the chair but outside of the smithy instead leaning against the wall close to the window.

Valka opened her mouth to get her attention but then stopped herself as she looked back down at the ax in her hands. After a few moments she made her decision, she slowly raised herself up and managed to carry the ax over to a clamp that was attached to the center table. She was going to have to do this fast for it to work.

Once the ax was in its place she tightened the clamp around the head. She then rushed over to the hanging tools and pulled down a pair of tongs and pliers from the hooks. She placed the tongs on the table next to the clamp and grabbed hold of the handle of the ax with the pliers. She twisted out the handle by jumping up and using what body weight she had to yank on it until it was loose enough to twist out by hand. After doing so she peeled off the tattered pieces of leather that still clung to the wood and then scraped at the outside skin of the wood to smooth its surface. Once finished she quickly swept up the debris and tossed them into the fire. Using the tongs, she picked up the wooden handle and brought it over to a small troth filled with linseed oil before submerging it inside. When she brought it back to the surface she quickly grabbed a cloth to wipe the excess oil back into the troth. She brought the wooden handle back over to the table and wiped at the surface until the oil was properly absorbed into the wood before putting it down. She then quickly ran over to the spare leathers and cut off several long strips, with which she ran over to the table and wrapped them around the handle as its new grips, recalling the places the girl held the ax. When she finished she

placed the handle back into the ax head and tightened it in to prevent slipping. As a final measure, she checked the balance of the ax to ensure good maneuverability.

When she was finished she carefully carried it outside. When the girl heard the door open her head swiveled to look at Valka and then down at the ax in her hands. "What did you do with it?" The girl asked astonished as she picked up the ax and began to swing it around experimentally "It almost looks brand new."

Valka took in a deep breath before letting it out as she sat down on one of the small barrels that lined the outside of the smithy "I did say I could fix it for you."

The girl looked hard at the ax before an uncomfortable sadness seemed to ghost its way across her features and she stated solemnly "I can't pay for this." She then turned and held the ax out to Valka as she said "You need to take it back until I can repay you."

"You don't have to. I'm just thanking you." Valka stated, "Besides it's a gift, I can't take it back." And as if to concur her own statement Valka lightly pushed the ax back toward the girl before leaning back and relaxing against the smithy. The girl looked down at the ax and said something else but Valka didn't catch it. Through the day's events and her efforts with fixing the ax, Valka felt the exhaustion finally getting the better of her, and knowing that Garth would be spending nearly all day at the great hall with his drinking game meant that she had the privilege to allow her eyes to shut for just a few moments.

Suddenly Valka was shook awake by a firm grip on her arm, opening her eyes to the girl who was looking at her in absolute horror and now yelling "WAKE UP!" into her face.

"What, what happened?" Valka woke startled.

The girl sighed in relief as she said "Odin's beard, don't do that, I thought you'd gone and went to Valhalla for a moment."

"Why would you think that? I was just sleeping." Valka stated now confused and slightly annoyed.

"You already look like you're going to fall over dead when your eyes are open."

Valka looked at the girl for a moment before saying "Thank you for summing that up." she then flopped her head back on the wall.

"Why don't you eat anything?" The girl asked "The docks are a perfect place to fish and the great hall has loads of food during dinner time."

"You can ask Spitelout who keeps breaking my fishing rods for fun. As for the great hall, I probably lasted about 5 1/2 seconds in there before I was chased out." Valka explained as she rubbed at her eyes.

"Why?"

Valka dropped her hands from her face and sighed at how obvious the

situation was, but figured if the girl was willing to listen she might as well give her an answer "I'm a runt, and an outcast because of it. It's been that way for four years. I'm not big enough to fight them off so they steal my food easily, making me smaller. I can't sleep because every waking moment I'm not working I'm either being chased or beat to a pulp, making me even more exhausted. I've honestly stopped hoping that the beatings will go away. I just want to have the chance to eat something, anything, three times a day for breakfast, lunch and dinner. That's all I think I can ask for."

The girl stared at her for several moments before she turned around to leave. Valka sighed and shut her eyes believing that this would be the first and last time she would ever interact with her when she heard the girl call out "Gilda." Valka's eyes opened wide to see the girl looking back at her and saying "My name is Gilda."

Valka stared after the girl for a few seconds before she responded back "Valka." The girl, now known as Gilda, nodded her head at the name before turning around and walking back up the hill and out of sight.

The next morning, Valka quietly slipped into work. She was happy to say that no one had tried to jump her this morning. She had almost thought she would have though when she had walked in front of Spitelout. She noticed he now sported a large black eye and she wondered if Gilda had given that to him when she had broke up the fight. She also worried that that would be a reason for him to become even angrier with her, but when he looked at her, he only cringed slightly before quickly picking up his pace and walking off. Valka couldn't help but do a double take to make sure she saw that correctly.

Valka began to maneuver her way over to the grinding stone when Garth yelled at her "OI! Valka!" Valka winced at the sound of his voice. She knew this day was starting off too good. "There's a smelly package on my table for you. Get it off!" Valka twisted around to see if what he'd said was true. Lo and behold there was a package of brown paper with her name written on the outside wrapping. But she never received anything before, why would she be getting something now? "You just gonna stand there and stare at it?" Garth growled at her. Valka quickly jumped from her position and snatched the parcel off the table before Garth's patience wore any thinner.

When she had the package safely on her side of the forge she sat down on the stool for the grinding stone and set the package in her lap. She opened it up and found three raw fish, each with a small note attached to them by a string that wrapped around their gills. Out of curiosity, Valka picked up the dangling note that was attached to the far left fish and read the word that had been written there. Breakfast.

She reread the word twice before she looked at the other two and picked up the middle fish's note. Lunch. A small smile adorned her face as she picked up the last note and it read just as she had predicted. Dinner.

The first tear she had shed since she was nine ran down her face as she smiled upward and very quietly whispered, "Thank you Gilda."

**I didn't know if I wanted to give you the last chapter and this

chapter together or separate, so I did both. They are separate chapters but I imputed them at the same time.**

Sorry no Stoick yet. He's coming really soon. I swear!

Happy President's day

This chapter is pretty short I know, they will vary in length as I continue.

5. Forest Conversations & Training Lessons

I own nothing.

I know its been a while since my last chapter, but I've been barely dragging this chapter along lately. It's not that I've lost interest, oh no, it's just that this specific chapter is the one part of my story that I had several really good ideas to move upon but I could only have one path. It was really confusing; this chapter and the next, but I am happy to say that I got it finished and the next chapter is underway with out a hitch.

Happy reading.

The Forest Conversations and Training Lessons

After that day, Valka would receive a package on the table bearing three random fish and her name each morning, which she gratefully ate throughout the day. There had almost never been a time where she would go to sleep in her tree house without her stomach crying out for food, but now it remained blissfully silent. The people's animosity toward her stayed the same and the chasing's continued, but she was slowly getting faster as the days continued. More often than not now she could outrun her pursuers. It still wasn't easy but at least she had more energy to work with now. After the third day of the deliveries however, she had to place a note on the table requesting the package be delivered to her stool. Garth had finally lost his patience with the cluttering of his work space that morning, and the package was the final tipping point. She could still feel the strike marks on her back from the tool he used on her. She had not written this reason in her note, but she had thankfully found the package perched on her stool the next day.

It was about two weeks after the first delivery that a large drink-off broke out between all the adult Vikings at the Great Hall and she had been ordered by Garth to stay out of the forge while he was gone. This meant she had the day off, and she couldn't think of a happier place to spend it than playing around in the upper canopies of the trees. A small cloth bag was securely tied across her left shoulder and torso, the contents of which were the rare fruit or two she found hanging in the trees during her exploration, a small knife, and some rope she made out of leather strips. She walked across branches like they were bridges, and climbed up the trunks of the trees with ease from the amount of ridges in the bark that adorned them. She jumped through the vast green foliage she considered her sanctuary, trying to collect as many of the small fruits she could find for this special occasion.

It was nearing the beginning of the only spring month on Berk and it

was the time when the fruits came out at their greatest. The forest was lush with life at this time and the leaves that adorned the great aspens and pines were at their fullest. Soft moss ran like a light green carpet across most of the mud-brown bark. Grey boulders, large bushes, ferns and tall grass decorated the forest floor like a painted canvas; and every last inch of it was lightly dusted with the last remnants of the winter snow.

Every now and again Valka would find something special hidden in the woods, like the huge cove that's passage way was hidden behind two boulders you had to slide in-between to get to the other side. Then there was the large mud slope that led almost all the way to the bridge that separated the village island from the main one. She'd used that one several times when she found herself waking up almost too late for work.

At one point she climbed all the way to the top of a tree, just before the branches were too small to hold her weight, to observe her surroundings and see if she could spy a fruit anywhere close by. As she searched the great expanse of the forest around her she watched the wind move over the tops of the trees, rustling their leaves and forcing them to sway. As the branches of the trees shook from the force of the wind Valka grasped hold of the trunk of the tree to prevent herself from being blown off. It was then when she spied it, it was only a flash but she knew she'd seen the fruit hiding just underneath the leaves of a tree. It wasn't even too far. Only one tree in-between her and it, simple.

Valka let go of the bark on the great pine she was currently perched on and bent down to use her hands and feet to clamber across the branch toward its edge. If there was anyone below her at this moment they could have mistaken her for an abnormally large squirrel from the way she moved. As the needles at the end of the branch began to dip from her weight she stopped and focused on a good landing location on the next tree. She waited until the wind slowed just enough to allow the branches to still before she picked a good thick branch only a few feet below her location. Her leg muscles tensed and her hands loosened their grip on the branch beneath her as she crouched down to get the optimum jump. She paused in that position for only a moment, before she jumped. Arms extended and fingers spread wide, Valka jutted out into the air for just a moment before gravity took its course and she began to dive down toward the branch.

The moment her hands touched the coarse wood of the branch they clamped down like a vice. Her body was yanked to a stop and began to swing underneath as the branch bowed from the sudden contact before springing back up to its rightful place. As she hung in the air Valka looked below her and spied another branch just a little below her feet. Valka released her grip from the branch above her and fell to the next branch. Her boots made contact with the wood and she wobbled for a moment to keep her balance on the shaking branch before steadily walking to the center of the tree. She clambered around the trunk and quickly repeated the process on the other side. When she landed on the next branch however, she used its upward swing to help pull herself upward and maneuver her way on top of it. When she stood up, she looked around to find the fruit she had seen earlier hanging just three branches above her current position. She smiled as she swiftly climbed up the tree and perched herself on the very branch that held her fruit. She shimmied her way to the edge of the branch

until she could reach out and pluck it from its resting place.

She studied the fist-sized fruit for a moment, rolling it around in her grasp to see every crevice. If it had any marks of intrusion from bugs or worms she would have to throw it away. But the violet skin that covered the fruit was unmarked and smooth, so she happily tucked her prize away in the bag. While placing it inside she quickly counted up her current load. She had a total of five now. She looked up into the sky and checked the time to find it was only a little past mid-day; she should have plenty of time to drop this load off at her tree house and then go out to search for some crab-apples or some elderberries.

Just as she got up to move however a loud yell echoed through the woods. Valka swiveled around on her branch to face the direction of the sound. It sounded like it came from a person, a very angry individual at that, and it was coming from even deeper into the woods than she was. Now that was strange, barely anyone bothered to enter the woods unless they had to, and when they did it was for some menial task that had them go in the outskirts of the forest for only a short while. The person was either frustrated because they were lost or in a big fight. She didn't want to encroach on a fight; the participants might turn their anger on her. Not that they could reach her, but it would mean she would have to remain in a random tree until they left. She had spent weeks trying to move everything to a new location when Chief Haldor had found her hideout and she didn't want to have to repeat the process. If someone was lost however, she might not be the person they wanted to see, but at least she could lead them out of the forest. So with a heaving sigh leaving her lips, she traveled toward the source of the noise.

As she jumped, ran, climbed, and clambered her way through the throng of trees, the yelling was quickly becoming louder and more frequent. When she was finally in a tree just above the voice Valka looked down and saw a person she hadn't laid eyes on in two weeks. Gilda now paced back and forth on the ground waving her arms and yelling into the sky in frustration, suddenly she stopped walking and stared up at a spot on a tree that Valka couldn't see before she picked up a rock and threw it at her target. Valka heard a small ping of rock hitting metal before all was silent for a moment. Confused by this random act Valka opened her mouth to gain Gilda's attention, but silenced when her ears were met with a long string of profanity.

"SON OF A CHEAP, LYING, NO GOOD, ROTTEN, HALF-TROLL, LOW LIFE, SNAKE LICKING, DIRT EATING, INBRED, OVERSTUFFED, STUPID, BLOOD SUCKING, DOG KISSING, BRAINLESS, (gasp) DICK-LESS, HOPELESS, WORTHLESS, HEARTLESS, FAT BUTTED, BUG EYED, STIFF LEGGED, SPOTTED LIP, WORM HEADED, SACK OF DRAGON DUNG!"

Valka stared in fascination for a moment as she watched Gilda gasp for breath after such a long winded declaration before deciding to announce her presence "That's a nice range of vocabulary you got there!"

Gilda swiveled on the spot and looked around for a moment before yelling out "Whoever you are show yourself, or I'm going to knock you into next week!"

"Look up!" Valka yelled back before she began her trek across the branches to see what exactly was making Gilda so angry all of a

sudden.

"Valka? What are you doing up there?!" Gilda yelled as she watched Valka maneuver her way across the branches just as easily as if she were walking on the ground.

"I could ask you the same question about being this deep into the woods." Valka called back as she climbed her way over to the other side of the tree and looked down. Embedded about half way up the tree's trunk was the ax that she had fixed for Gilda only two weeks prior. "Odin's beard Gilda, what did you do?"

"I was practicing with my ax and I just threw it too high. Just leave it alone, I can get it." As Gilda said this, Valka made her way down the branches until she reached the lowest one.

"Yes, because that last statement you made was one of pure joy from the great progress you were making." Valka stated as she swung herself upside-down to hang from the branch from her legs. Gilda growled at this but she didn't say anything else in response. Upon further inspection the ax seemed to be perfectly spaced between the ground and the branches. You couldn't jump from the ground and grab it, and even in the position she was in Valka still couldn't stretch her arms out far enough to touch the handle.

Valka swung herself back up so she was sitting on the branch as she opened up her bag to pull out the leather rope. She took one end and made a loop with it while she tied the other end to her wrist. She then leaned back and allowed herself to swing down to hang from her legs again. Eyeing the wooden handle of the ax she tossed the loop at it, only to have it miss. She sighed and pulled back the rope to try again. Three more times she tried and failed, one time it hit its mark but slipped off from the handle before she could tighten it. Valka groaned in frustration for a moment just letting the loop hang there when a stick grabbed at it and started moving it toward the ax handle. Valka waited as Gilda used the stick to maneuver the loop around the ax handle and push it up as far as she could reach before Valka tightened it.

Valka quickly swung herself back up to sit on the branch before she stood on it and began to pull as hard as she could, but the ax wouldn't yield to her. She then yanked on the rope so hard she lost her balance and fell over the other side. Now hanging from the leather rope tied to her wrist Valka looked over to see if she had at least moved it. The ax didn't even budge from its position. "Okay, this is just insulting." Valka stated flatly.

"Why don't you let me try?" Gilda laughed from underneath her dangling helper. Valka huffed before she swung back and forth on the rope until she looped a leg around the branch she had previously stood on. She then used the rope to pull the rest of her up and over the branch to fall to the ground. She landed on all fours before standing up to remove the rope from her wrist. When she had just managed to slip it off, Gilda walked up to the rope that lay on the ground a little ways from the tree, grasped it, and gave it a hard tug. The ax popped out of its placement and fell swinging towards Gilda's head. Valka gasped in fear that it would hit its mark, but its trajectory was stopped on a dime by Gilda's waiting hand.

No sooner had the reunion between ax and hand been made, Gilda swung

the ax around in a great arc bringing it around her body. Just as her arm and the ax were both completely extended and in line with her shoulders she changed the course of the swing by directing it down and then back up. As the ax was moving into its peak swing Gilda pivoted on the spot and brought her second hand up to join its twin as the ax was brought back down to seemingly kill an invisible foe. Right before the ax head hit the ground its trajectory was once again stopped almost effortlessly.

When she had finished Gilda blew out a deep breath and looked over at Valka, who had quietly watched the spectacle, and said "You know, you still haven't answered my earlier question."

Shocked out of her focus on the skill that the blade was handled with, Valka paused for a moment to register the girl's words before asking "What was your earlier question?"

Gilda rolled her eyes and placed her spare hand at her hip. "What were you doing up in the tree branches?"

"OH!" Valka exclaimed in remembrance "I was collecting fruit!"

Gilda raised one of her eyebrows as she stated in disbelief "Fruit."

"Yeah," Valka stated as she dug around in her bag to pull out one of the violet spheres and show it to her friend, "they're really good, you want to try one?"

Gilda stared at the fruit for a few seconds before her eyes strayed to the bone thin fingers that held it. The grip on her ax handle tightened and hesitance graced her features as she asked "Don't you need that?"

The smile that had alighted itself on Valka's face faltered slightly at this and she looked at the fruit as well. "A while ago, I would have agreed with you." Valka concurred sadly. She then looked back up at the girl who had shown her the first scrap of kindness in over four years and managed to smile again as she stated "But I'm happy to say now it is not quite so needed any more. Besides, why have a meal alone when you can share it with someone else?"

Gilda hesitated only a little longer before she walked over to Valka and accepted the fruit from her. Valka watched with baited breath as Gilda took a small bite out of the flesh of the fruit, the excess juice dribbling down her chin as she chewed and then swallowed. Gilda wiped a hand across her chin to remove it of the liquid as she said "I think I just ate a solid form of sugar water." Valka froze in place, hoping she didn't just make a horrible mistake when Gilda continued "It's not bad." and took a far more generous bite from the fruit. Valka smiled at the small victory before sitting down on the ground and pulling out a fruit for herself. Gilda walked over to her and sat cross-legged on the ground in front of her before placing the ax across her lap. She untied the other end of the rope from the ax and handed it over to Valka who quickly wrapped it up and stuffed it back into her bag.

They both ate in silence for a little while; Valka chewing through a good three fruits, before Gilda broke it. "How did you manage to get up there in the first place? No one else I know of can manage to get

any higher than a few feet up before they fall down." Valka looked over at Gilda who was now looking questionably at the high branches of the tree, the half-eaten fruit resting in her left hand while her right hand lazily rubbed at the ax handle.

"I just climbed." Valka answered simply. "Don't you ever climb anything?"

Gilda tensed and quickly looked away from the high branches as she stated "I prefer to keep my feet on the ground." Valka was confused by Gilda's reaction but had little time to dwell on it when Gilda looked at her and asked "What about you? Don't you ever practice with a weapon?"

It was now Valka's turn to tense up. "I...can't"

"What do you mean you can't?" Gilda asked in disbelief "Anyone can wield a weapon!"

"Because I just can't." Valka stated ruefully.

"That's not an answer." Gilda stated sharply.

"Well what about yours?" Valka asked before sitting as straight as she could and placing her hands on her hips in a small imitation of Gilda as she repeated "'I prefer to keep my feet on the ground.'" What kind of answer is that?"

"That's different." Gilda growled.

"Really? 'Cause it sounds about the same as saying you can't either."

"I can climb!" Gilda shouted now enraged.

"Then why didn't you climb the tree trunk to get your ax? The crevices on the bark are pretty wide at the bottom, it would have been only too easy to scale the extra four feet you needed to reach it." Gilda visibly paled to the color of a cloud at this remark. She tried several times to answer Valka's statement but when she couldn't seem to find her voice anymore, she clenched her jaw and looked away from Valka as if to refuse her an answer. Valka studied Gilda's reaction to her question before quickly going over the girl's answer to her previous question in her mind. Then it hit her.

"You're afraid of h-" Valka was cut off when Gilda's ax head suddenly found itself situated under Valka's chin.

"Say one more word and it'll be the last thing you ever speak." Gilda growled and the grip on her ax handle tightened in emphasis.

Valka smiled and raised up her hands in mock surrender. Gilda rolled her eyes and removed the ax head from its position and placed it back on her lap. Once the ax was safely off her neck again Valka dropped her hands and quickly stated "I can't wield a weapon because I'm either too weak to lift it or I don't know how to use it. Even the knife I have in my bag is more of a tool for me than an actual weapon."

"Why don't you try to teach yourself?" Gilda asked confused "I've

been doing that by myself for a while now by watching others and then repeating it, making it mine by adding my own spin to it."

"It's not that simple." Valka groaned, "I can't teach myself because all the weapons I can pick up just don't feel right, and when I try to use them I end up hurting myself more than the dummy."

Gilda sighed before closing her eyes and crossing her arms over her chest. She sat like that for a few seconds before asking "What weapons have you tried?"

"Mostly just the sword."

"Okay," Gilda said, still retaining her position "What do you mean when you say it doesn't feel right?"

"I don't know." Valka tried to explain. "It just feels awkward, like my balance is too far forward."

Gilda opened her eyes at this and smiled as she stated "Well, to the armory it is." Then she got up and tossed the finished fruit pit away before walking in the direction of the village.

"Wait!" Valka called after her as she got up to catch up with her. "What do you mean by the armory?" Valka asked when she was next to Gilda.

"I'm going to help you find your weapon, and I'm going to teach you how to use it." Gilda stated without a break in her stride.

Valka looked at Gilda in surprise for a moment before she bowed her head in sadness and informed her "It's not possible. I can't be trained."

"Nonsense," Gilda stated waving the statement off. "Everyone can be trained."

"But the sword-"

"Just isn't your weapon."

Valka froze in her tracks. She had heard this once before, from her sister, but she never thought she would ever hear this level of reassurance for her faults from anyone else. She had almost forgotten what it felt like. "Hurry up, the day's not going to last forever!" Gilda called back to her. Valka jumped from her thoughts and sprinted over to Gilda in an effort to catch up to the girl.

As they traveled, Valka couldn't help but think about all that had just happened along with the past two weeks of occurrences, and she couldn't help but wonder exactly what she did to gain this person's attention. Sure she fixed her ax, but that had technically been paid for by disrupting the fight and then helping with the buckets. Then there was the fact that it got stuck in the tree, but she wasn't the one that pulled it out. She only managed to wrap a rope around it; Gilda was the one to pull it from its position. So why did Gilda deem it necessary to train her, and why bring her so many fish? If it was to repay for the ax, she had already done so after the fifth delivery. Why continue?

Gilda seemed to be having difficulty with the silent trek through the forest, so in an attempt to break it she decided to ask "So, what was wrong with the table?"

Valka looked over at Gilda, confusion written all over her face from the question before realization donned on her "Oh! The table,... well Garth normally uses the table for his work space, and he doesn't enjoy it when it's too cluttered."

"But it's always cluttered." Gilda countered.

"Well yes, normally it is," Valka agreed before continuing, "but he didn't like the way the fish smelled so he wanted me to relocate the delivering spot of the package."

Gilda grunted in response before saying "I just thought you didn't like that spot, or the wood was bad or something. I didn't know that the stingy blacksmith didn't like it, I would have put a big trout on some of his designs if I'd have known that."

Valka shuddered at the possible responses that Garth would have had to that before quickly changing the subject "Speaking of the fish, why have you been giving them to me?"

"I told you." Gilda responded "I couldn't pay for my ax. It's repayment."

"But you've already re-paid your debt after the fifth delivery." Valka countered "You didn't need to give me any more."

At this Gilda paused in her stride and faced Valka before very deliberately looking up and down her form. Then Gilda reached out and grabbed Valka's forearm before bringing it up for Valka to see. Even after two weeks of fish it was still so bone-thin that Gilda's fingers connected with each other on the opposite side. "Looks to me like I haven't been repaying you nearly enough." Gilda then released her grip on Valka's arm and asked "Do you like salmon?"

Valka was a little taken aback by the sudden question but answered it none-the-less "Um,... I don't know. I've never had a chance to try it."

"Good." Gilda stated happily as she began her quick stride again. "You'll have a chance in the next package."

Valka and Gilda traveled a little further before Valka asked one more question. "If the fish is repayment, then why teach me how to use a weapon?"

Gilda smiled at this and answered "Friends don't let friends fight alone or without weapons." Then she turned around and laughed, "besides, I want to see the look on Spitelout's face when you plow his mud-eating head into the ground."

Valka couldn't help but smile in content as they walked to the edge of the woods and made their way across the bridge that led to the village. Gilda in the meantime went into a never ending rant of Spitelout's character and at certain points stating a few choice words on where she'd like to stick the head of her ax. The words seemingly coming out of her mouth in a waterfall from how each

sentence seemed to blur into the next at the speed and rate in which they were spoken. "And he's supposed to be the second in line to the Chieftain spot. If Stoick is anything like that I can't imagine what-."

"Stoick?" Valka asked confused by the name. She swore she'd heard that name before but she couldn't recall exactly when.

"Stoick. Son of Chief Haldor, first in line. Blahdi-blahdi-blah. Anyway-"

"NO!" At this moment Valka had grabbed hold of Gilda's arm causing Gilda to silence her speech and look questioningly at Valka's sudden exclamation. Valka quickly let go of Gilda's arm before clearing her throat and giving a small apology before asking "Who exactly is Stoick?"

"You mean you don't know?" Gilda asked in amazement. Valka shook her head in response. "Well, I know he's the son of the current Chief and the first in line to becoming the next Chief. But, I've never really met him, at least not face to face. I've always seen him standing next to his father or walking along behind him, he doesn't tend to talk much. I can't say much about his character, but you can just _tell_ that Chief Haldor is his father."

"What do you mean by that?" Valka inquired.

"He's HUGE." And to emphasize her meaning Gilda spread her arms out as wide as they'd go before dropping them back to her sides and saying "Not to mention he's practically an exact copy." Valka tried to imagine a slightly smaller version of the massive sized Chief Haldor and couldn't help but thank the gods that she had not yet run into this boy. He would be able to snap her in half almost too easily.

"Here we are." Gilda stated, effectively cutting Valka from her thoughts and directing her attention to a massive wooden building with metal support beams. A large door marked the entrance and a large wooden plank sat across the double doors acting as a locking system.

"They just put a plank over the door?" Valka asked confused at the lack of security "What if someone steals the weapons?"

"Oh, please." Gilda scoffed "Have you _tried_ unlocking a padlock during a dragon raid? It takes _way_ too much time. The plank is there for easy access, besides most people already have a personal weapon or two at their home, so they don't need to take any of the weapons from here unless theirs gets messed up." As she said this Gilda swiftly shoved the plank off of its resting place and allowed it to fall down into the dirt with one of its metal hooks still holding it up at an angle. Gilda then pulled the unblocked door open and walked inside with Valka quickly following after.

Valka had spent her days and most of her nights in a forge; she was used to seeing weapons, but not of this magnitude. Swords, axes, and daggers lined the walls like decorations, their edges easily sharp enough to split a hair. Bolas and nets hung from the ceiling by hooks for easy access, while longbows and crossbows sat perched on the numerous shelves with their arrows already nocked waiting for the

time to be drawn back and fired. A large pile of shields sat in the far left corner, each with their own unique picture painted on their faces. Huge maces, hammers, and clubs leaned against the lower walls, and a whole stack of spears stood proudly in a long rack against the far wall. Valka could only stand and gawk at the amount of weapons there were, she would need at least two-no, three days just to count the weapons on the walls.

"Well, go on." Gilda said, Valka looked at her in confusion for a moment until she waved her hand around the room and stated "Pick one and just play with it for a while, if it doesn't feel right just put it back and pick another." and with that she walked over to the side of the large building and sat down on the dirt floor. At the same time, she pulled out an emery stone from a small pouch that hung from her skirt, with which she began running down the blade of her ax. A small scraping noise emitted from each swipe.

Valka took in a deep breath and let it out before beginning her trek around the armory walls. She didn't even bother looking at the weapons on the floor. She wouldn't even be able to lift them much less use them, so those were an immediate "no". The sword she'd already tried, so that was out, and the axes were also a "no" since she could barely maneuver Gilda's around the smithy. The daggers were similar to her knife but she could learn how to properly use one of those in a one-on-one situation; she decided to put that in a "maybe" pile. So, now that she knew what she couldn't use she could start experimenting.

The first experimental objects were the bolas and the nets, though that quickly ended when she accidentally got caught in the net she had pulled down and a coinciding bola chose that moment to fall onto her head. Quickly after releasing herself from the net she grabbed one of the tying rocks on the bola that had struck her and angrily threw it so it would land across the room. Unfortunately the other two rocks on the bola followed the first's trajectory and successfully wrapped themselves around their victim. Valka quickly retrieved her knife and removed the restricting ropes from her body. The sound of Gilda choking down a great deal of laughter made its way into Valka's ears to which she merely rolled her eyes and ignored her friend's mirth at her expense.

No, and no.

Next were the crossbows and the longbows. The longbows she could assume were a fair weapon, if she could just manage to pull one back. Perhaps when she gained enough strength in her arms she could use it someday. She thought she'd leave that in the "maybe" pile, along with her knife. The crossbows were very front-weight orientated and like the sword she couldn't help but feel like she was leaning forward while she was aiming. She did fall forward one time with her finger in the trigger, releasing the notched arrow. It ended up three inches deep into the wood plank just above Gilda's head, and Valka couldn't blame her when Gilda walked across the room to take a shield from the massive pile and prop it in-front of her before she began sharpening her ax once more, a quick "Keep going" echoing from behind the shield.

Definitely not.

The last weapons she hadn't yet tried were the spears. As Valka stood

next to them in their rack, she couldn't help but feel like she was looking at hundreds of towers standing side by side. She reached out and grabbed hold of the wooden shaft of one of the long spears but when she attempted to pull it from its position she found it would not move for her. She inspected further and found the rack that housed the spears held them so that they were slid through holes in the upper part of the rack so as to not fall down easily. Valka then pushed up on the spear to shimmy it out of its placement until she was standing almost on her toes trying to get the bottom of the spear out of the ring. In an attempt to quickly push it the rest of the way out Valka jumped and grabbed hold of the part of the wooden shaft that was already out of the ring. When her weight came back down however, the counter measures in the rack failed and the entire rack of spears slowly tipped forward. Valka only had enough time to run out of its way before it crashed to the ground.

The spear Valka had almost removed rammed headfirst into the dirt and the wooden shaft snapped right off from the weight of the rack, effectively flinging itself across the room. The spears still in their rings were shot out from the rack and scattered across the floor. Gilda had popped her head up to inquire what had happened only to quickly drop it back down as several spears flew against her shield.

When everything stilled, Gilda peaked over her shield to find the spears now spread along the floor. She looked a little further and found Valka now sprawled on the ground off to the side of the rack. She quickly got up and ran over to Valka, expertly maneuvering her way through the throng of scattered spears, before reaching out and grabbing hold of Valka's shoulder. "Valka?" Gilda asked as she checked for some sign of consciousness from her friend.

Valka rolled over onto her back, a look of annoyance and displeasure etched across her face as she sighed out "I'm alive."

Gilda released a breath she didn't know she was holding before she turned to the toppled spear rack and said "We'd better clean this up." Valka stood herself up and followed Gilda's lead. As she picked up spear after spear, sliding them into their proper location in the toppled rack, she could feel the weight of the sharp head pull down on one side of the wooden shaft. This weapon was no better than the sword. She sighed and her head drooped from the disappointment and uselessness that ran through her at this. She had already assumed that it was an inevitable truth, but to have it proven to her only added salt to the wound.

When all but the broken spear was placed back in the rack the two girls each took a side and after some straining of their muscles, Gilda's mostly, they managed to stand the rack back on its feet. After replacing the rack Gilda turned around and inspected the broken spear. "Odin's beard." Gilda stated as she sighted the now cracked and splintered wood that stuck out from the base of the metal head. Gilda gave the wood handle an experimental tug to remove the spear head from the ground, but it stood fast and refused to budge. She then began trying to wiggle it out of its position. When that didn't work, Gilda took out her knife and began digging at the dirt around the spear with its handle. "Were going to have to throw the handle away, it's too splintered to fix."

As Gilda worked on retrieving the spearhead from the ground, Valka

cast her sight around the armory's massive floor to find the wooden handle that hand flung itself across the room. When she had spotted it she walked over to it and grabbed hold of the center of the wood, but just as she lifted it off the ground she froze.

The balance... It was perfect.

Valka stared down at the wooden pole that now presided in her grip and experimentally twisted it around in her hand. It scraped against the ground a few times indicating it was a bit long for her, but she quickly remedied that by taking out her knife and trimming off the splintered section of the wood and taking off inch-by-inch of the rest of the wood as she continued to test it. It wasn't until the pole was a little less than her own height that she stopped shortening it and found her comfort zone. Before she even knew what she was doing she began to slowly maneuver the pole around her body, sliding her hands up and down the wood as it moved around her like water. It was so surreal the way it just slid into the different positions she requested of it, it was almost relaxing.

Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, she saw a silver object careening toward her and without thinking she swiveled the staff around to take the impact of the attacking object. It ricocheted off of the wood with a loud clack before falling to the ground. When Valka moved her head around to see the offending object she found the broken spear head still wobbling on the ground next to her feet. "Looks like we found your weapon." Valka looked up at the statement to find Gilda walking over to her with a look of approval on her face.

Valka relaxed her stance, allowing her arms to drop down to her sides with her hands holding the staff across her body. She looked from the spearhead and back to Gilda in confusion for only a moment before comprehension flew through her. "You threw that at me!"

Gilda just smiled and proudly stated "Yes I did."

"What if I hadn't blocked it?!" Valka cried out in indignation "I would've been skewered!"

Gilda couldn't help the laughter that escaped her at this statement. "Valka," Gilda half laughed half spoke to her now disgruntled friend "I wouldn't have thrown that at you if I thought you couldn't block it. You should have seen yourself; most people have a large amount of difficulty to move with their weapon as easily as you just did. You're a natural."

Valka couldn't believe her ears, so with a little hope in her voice she cautiously asked "So, I was good?"

"Well," Gilda stated calculatngly as she ran her fingers through the stray hairs on her head "your stances are slightly off balance, and the grip on your weapon might need to be adjusted so you don't accidentally have your fingers chopped off; but, yeah, you're pretty good."

The toothy smile that spread across Valka's face was so big, it was almost comical, but she didn't care. She did something right for a change, and she did it well. "Now don't get too happy." Gilda said seriously "You still have a lot of training to go through."

Never-the-less, when the two girls left the armory and returned back to their respective homes, both of them carried smiles on their faces.

The next morning, Valka found the package delivered to her stool was far bigger than its usual size. Gilda had apparently kept her word on getting larger fish, but when she opened the package to delve into its spoils a folded note fell from the paper wrapping and onto the ground. Valka quickly snatched it up and tore into it.

_Valka, _

_Seeing as most of your days are occupied, _

_we will instead conduct your first day of training at nightfall. _

_Meet me at my practice tree the moment the sun is down and bring your staff. _

_Don't be late. _

_Gilda. _

Valka reread the letter two times to make sure she understood it before stuffing it into the pocket of her smithy apron. The thought of finally learning how to wield a weapon excited her to no end. The only thing she had to worry about now was being late. Sure Gilda had given her plenty of time, but there were often times that large loads would unexpectedly drop in and she'd be stuck in the smithy till almost midnight trying to finish everything. In the hopes of deterring this possibility, Valka scuttled around the smithy as fast as her legs could carry her to finish the day's workload as soon as possible.

Garth had been absent this morning due to a massive hangover that resulted from a three barrel sprint, one of the many competitions made during yesterday's drink off in the Great Hall. She could have easily taken the day off again; after all he didn't think she was here. If the forge was swamped with broken and bent weapons by the time he got back though, his level of anger could be triggered by even the slightest mistake.

So with a quick hand she expertly heated, pounded, straightened, and sharpened all the weapons that were in the current "to do" pile. Every now and again a person would come to the window for a quick sharpening which would put her work on pause, but with a well practiced hand and quick fingers, she quickly finished the minor projects. After returning the weapons to the customer, she collected the individual's small fee of silver pieces before placing them inside of a leather-bound 'earnings' sack which held the day's profit and continued with her work.

As the work day progressed she didn't take any breaks to eat her food, rather she allowed the fish to cook over the furnace and stripped off pieces to eat while she worked. She soon found the meat of salmon to be dry and chewy and quickly thought of bringing in a few seasonings the next time to deter this. However, it was far more filling than the halibut she had been receiving, so she couldn't

complain too much.

The sun seemed to move so quickly through the sky that day. As it now stood proudly at its peak in the sky, she still had a good half of the mass of piled weapons to finish. Her hands were scratched and battered and her head was starting to get light from the burning furnace that she had currently softening the metal on a bent long-sword, but she continued. If she could just fix the weapons that needed to be heated she could easily finish the blunt ones in the morning.

It took her another several hours, but she managed to place the last weapon in the cart so they could be moved to the armory in the morning. Only one more thing to do before she could leave for the day. Count today's income and see if it matched what was charged. Valka quickly went over to the sack that held the day's profit and spilled it out over the middle table. Constantly checking the sun's continuously sinking position she laboriously counted every last gold chip, silver piece and bronze coin that resided within the sack. 46... 53... 61... 72! An exact count of what was charged!

Valka hurriedly scooped up the profits back into the sack and brought it over to the wall on the side of the smithy. She quickly looked around to see if any passersby were around before pounding on a board on the wall until it popped off. With a sad creak it fell to the floor vibrating off the ground for just a moment before laying still. Valka quickly looked behind the wood into the hidden compartment to find the large earnings chest. A large padlock attached to the front of the chest held the lid shut. Valka fished a small iron key from underneath the chest and stuck it in the padlock. As she toyed with the two pieces she thought back to the statement Gilda made about a padlock on the armory door and understood what she had meant. It was difficult to unlock while calm, she couldn't imagine how hard it would be while under the stress of battle.

Finally the lock opened with a loud click and Valka quickly opened the chest pouring in the contents of the sack to join the mass of coins already housed within the wooden container. Once empty, Valka shook the bag one more time for good measure before shutting the chest and placing the lock back in its place. She stuffed the key back under the chest and placed the empty bag on top of Garth's work desk before turning around and maneuvering the board back into its position in front of the hidden compartment. Valka rushed over to her side of the smithy and grabbed her staff off the wall it leaned against, thanking herself for having the thought to bring it with her instead of leaving it behind at her tree-house.

Valka sprinted out of the smithy just as the sun touched down on the edge of the earth. She had minutes before the sun was set completely and it took at least an hour's walk to get to Gilda's practice tree. She ran hard on the grass that extended past the village fields, and sprinted across the wooden bridge to the edge of the forest, simultaneously tying the staff to her back so it rested across her left shoulder and down her right hip. She dared not use the branches for fear of the speed of which she needed to travel would cause an unfortunate slip and end in a painful fall to the earth. Thus she subjected herself to the twists and turns of the large boulders that slowed her journey.

She looked up for only a moment to check her time, and felt her heart

sink. She was almost there but the sky had already begun turning darker from the lack of light. She pushed herself harder across the ground, the soil grinding beneath her feet and the random twig snapping beneath her weight. The moment the forest broke around her to show the practice tree, Valka jolted back and practically skidded to a stop in-front of Gilda. Valka gasped in air to try and regain her breath as the sweat poured down her face, her form bent over to rest against her shaking legs in an attempt to rest without sitting down.

After a few moments, Valka looked up to view Gilda sitting cross legged on the ground with her head resting in the palm of her hand. Her signature ax lay across her lap with its sharp blades bound in an assortment of leathers and cloths. The look that adorned her face was expressionless and businesslike as she took in Valka's condition. "You're late." She stated flatly.

"I know, (pant) I was--"

"Just work on your running a bit more. You'll get used to it."

",... what?"

Gilda ignored her friend's confounded expression and said as she stood up "Since it seems you've had a fare amount of cardio, you can start on muscle build up. Start off with three rounds of ten crunches, ten push-ups, and ten lunges. While you're doing that, I'll take your staff and get it prepared for you." With that Gilda held out her hand and waited until Valka untied the staff from her back and handed it over. As Valka began the exercises she was tasked, Gilda sat down with the long weapon and began rapping each end in a menagerie of leathers and cloths, similarly to her own weapon.

By the time she was finished with the first set Valka's muscles were already burning like fire and before she could even start up the second set of push-ups her muscles gave out and her arms collapsed underneath her. She landed on the ground with a small thump and an 'ooph' was shoved from her mouth by the contact quickly gaining Gilda's attention. "Oh, good!" Gilda stated happily as she took in Valka's crumpled form "Look's like I've finished just in time." Valka dragged her head around to look at Gilda questioningly but her sight was quickly filled with one of the now leather-bound and cloth-padded ends of her staff.

Valka managed to grasp her staff from where it lay in-front of her and gather herself to her feet, a daunting task as all the muscles in her body felt like they had the same consistency as cooked noodles. When she was finally on her feet, Gilda cleared her throat and began to speak "For your first several lessons, I will be sparing with you. Since you already seem to have an affinity for moving your weapon I will instead focus on your balance and your grip. We will start simple, I will make several attempts to strike you and I want you to block as many of my attacks as possible." With that Gilda took a position in-front of Valka and held up her ax in her left hand, her right now resting on the belt of her skirt behind her back.

"But I'm exhausted," Valka groaned. "I've barely begun to catch my breath from the run, and I can barely hold up my weapon. How am I supposed to fight?"

Gilda raised her eyebrow "You expect your opponent to wait for you to be ready?"

Valka bowed her head and replied "No."

"Exactly." Gilda stated before suddenly lunging forward and swinging her ax in an arc toward Valka's side. Valka quickly maneuvered her weapon over to block the strike but the moment the weight of the ax struck the wood of the staff her arms gave out and she was shoved sideways. She stumbled several feet trying to keep her footing before falling to the ground. When she tried to pick herself back up Gilda's ax pressed down on her throat and stopped her movement "When you enter battle, or are attacked by a random enemy, it is often unexpected and sudden." Gilda explained "You have to be ready to fight for your life even when you're exhausted because your opponent will take as many advantages against you as they can." As she said this Gilda removed her ax from Valka's throat and held out her hand to help Valka back up. Once Valka was standing again Gilda walked back to her starting position and concluded "My goal is to have you be able to fight off the average enemy while you are at your weakest. This way when you are attacked you can be ready for it."

"But how am I supposed to do that when I barely have the energy to move?" Valka asked as she also returned to her starting place.

Gilda sighed before stepping back and beginning to lazily swing her ax around as she said "It's not about who has the strongest muscle in a fight. A lot of times a good stance and some decent maneuverability is all you really need. Fighting with your weapon should be as easy as breathing, because the weapon is doing all the work. You just guide it in the direction you want it to go." Gilda then swung her ax underhanded up toward the sky before quickly twisting its trajectory in mid-swing, bringing it back down across her body with seemingly minimal effort.

"Now," Gilda began "take a fighting stance." Valka complied easily slipping into a comfortable position with her weapon held in her hands so one end was low to the ground behind her and the other end was pointed toward an invisible opponent. "Make sure your knees are slightly bent and a little wider to help stabilize yourself, and loosen your grip so it's ready to move. A lot of novices lose most of their energy simply because they think they need to keep their weapon in a death-grip at all times, and make sure you breathe, you don't want to pass out when you're fighting, believe me. Now, again." Gilda stated as she moved into her ready stance as well.

Valka practiced with Gilda until well into the night when Gilda decided to stop for the day, on account that when she had asked Valka to once again take a stance she found the girl lightly snoring as she stood in place. After shaking Valka awake the two decided it best to continue the training tomorrow.

Days of this training turned into weeks, weeks into months. Soon, the green leaves of summer began to turn colors and the first flecks of winter started to roll in, bringing with it the cold and sudden weather changes. Each day that passed Valka was fed with the fish given to her, giving her more energy and finally beginning to rehabilitate her weight; and each night that passed Valka was trained in the art of combat. With Gilda quickly advancing her to more complex levels of fighting day by day, Valka had no choice but to be

a quick learner and choose her moves carefully. Gilda always came out on top in the end; however there was this sheen of sweat that adorned her brow now that didn't exist in their earlier days of training.

Every now and again, Gilda would have Valka put down the staff and play around with the knife and the long bow, mostly to see how well she could use other weapons. She could now throw the knife with decent accuracy at the practice tree; the bow however, was still a challenge. Over the past few months she had already gained back a good 25 pounds, but that still left her at a total of 85 and she was only _just_ beginning to gain enough muscle to pull back the string. Gilda would often frown at this but she would not voice much on the subject of the thinner girl's weight, the only reaction she now gave to the subject would be to feel at Valka's arm every few days or so and then shove the nearest piece of food available into Valka's hands.

Valka was just happy that she wasn't looking at a skeleton in the water anymore.

During the short breaks that occurred between training sessions Gilda and Valka would stop to stretch their worn muscles while they caught their breath. At the same time they would start small conversations with each other, talking about what they did throughout the day, what they accomplished, and sometimes talking about past memories. Gilda so far was the only one to partake in the last category as Valka veered away from the topic like a dragon trying to avoid an eel that had been thrown in its pen.

Gilda wasted no breath in revealing that the ax she cared for was actually her late father's first weapon and that her family had a lineage of strong fighters. When Valka asked of Gilda's family status in the tribe, Gilda gave only a short explanation by saying "We're respected for what we do as warriors, but the life of a soldier doesn't gain you much wealth to speak of."

At the end of each training session both girls would go their separate ways and agree to continue the session the next day. It was during the early weeks of the stormy winter months however, that this constant flow was interrupted.

Valka and Gilda were at the practice tree going through another round of sparring. Valka's breath was smooth and passed evenly through her mouth as the sweat poured down her brow and each strike or block by her staff was quick and strong even with her muscles shaking with strain. Gilda had finally switched her weapon to her more dominant hand, which was a huge victory for Valka. Both girls were covered in the dirt of the ground from countless falls and quick rolls to dodge sudden strikes. Yet they both focused solely on who they were facing. It was only when a long slow 'boom' rumbled over their heads that they stopped and looked upward where dark, ominous clouds now covered the once clear night sky.

Not a moment after the warning rumble sounded, icy rain began falling from the sky. "The storm wasn't supposed to start for another day!" Gilda growled in frustration. "Come on, we need to get out of the storm before it picks up." Gilda grabbed Valka's arm and attempted to pull her back to the village but Valka pulled back and forced Gilda to stop.

"Where are you going?!" Valka shouted over the increasing howl of the wind.

"We can both stay in my home to take shelter!" Gilda answered quickly before trying to tug Valka along again, but the thinner girl stood fast and Gilda couldn't help but feel a small spark of pride when Valka was able to yank her arm out of the larger girl's grip.

"The hail will already be falling from the sky before we even get half way there!" Valka countered, the wind picked up speed around them as if to support her argument.

"Then where are we supposed to go!? We can't just stay out here and freeze to death!"

Valka stayed silent for just a moment as the question left her friend's mouth. She knew the perfect place to go to get out of the storm, but it was also... "Can you keep a secret?" Gilda was taken aback, but when she looked at the seriousness and desperation that adorned Valka's face she understood that what Valka was about to do was extremely outside of her comfort zone. Valka very rarely gave away much of her personal life, actually she never gave away anything that people didn't see on a regular day basis. So to have her ask that, Gilda knew she was about to bear witness to something that very likely would never be shown to anyone else. So, with the knowledge of how much trust was being placed in her, Gilda silently nodded in response.

"Follow me." With that said, Valka turned around and began to sprint away with Gilda quickly following after.

As the two girls ran through the forest the wind continued to pick up around them. The treetops swayed and the branches whipped through the air as the wind tousled them. The leaves that were holding back the brunt of the rain were quickly losing their ability to hold the water that was pelting them and it quickly started soaking the girls running beneath. The ground the two ran on was softening and quickly turning into mud, which began clinging to the girl's feet, slowing their travel and almost tripping them at some points.

Everything was slowly becoming numb on her, everywhere that the rain touched her skin a quick icy sting would shoot through the skin and sap out more of her body heat, but Valka kept running, she knew they were almost there, only a few more yards and they would be at the opening. The splash of water from a large puddle behind her indicated that Gilda was still trailing her by only a few feet. Valka swerved around another tree and found herself staring at a great rock face covered to the brim in vines and tree roots. She quickly ran over to it and shoved her arm into one of the openings between two thick roots. The icy rain was now pelting her in full force as there were no trees in the small clearing to help shield her, and they were quickly beginning to morph into ice crystals that struck at her head and body, scratching at her face and battering every last inch of her that they could reach. Even through this she continued to concentrate on her task until her hand made purchase with a thick rope. She grasped hold and wasted no time in yanking it out of its position.

At the same time a large patch of vines suddenly swung off of the

rock face revealing a wooden door on the opposite side of the vines and a large crack in the rocks that they concealed. Valka reached out and held the door open before letting go of the rope. She quickly gestured for Gilda to enter and the larger girl sprinted inside. Valka entered just behind her and allowed the door to shut behind her.

Once inside the rock face, Gilda had just enough time to look behind her and watch a sort of pulley system that involved the weight of a rock to yank the rope back into its original resting place before the door was swung shut behind them and the light was blocked out. Neither Gilda nor Valka spoke a word but the rock crevice was still filled with the sound of hail from the storm as it struck endlessly at the stone and vines outside. Now with time to catch her breath, the heat she had built up while she was running quickly vanished and the water that soaked her clothes forced a shiver from her; the low temperature that emitted from the rock did nothing to help keep her warm. In an effort to hold in some of the warmth she still possessed, Gilda wrapped her arms around herself and curled her legs into her body as she sat down.

As Gilda sat down on the ground she heard Valka move around her for a few seconds until she stilled. A short moment of silence followed before a sharp clack resounded through the rock crevice, and Valka's face was lit up by a spark before quickly disappearing again. Several more clacks followed until the low whoosh of flame coming to life came forth and Valka held the now-lit torch above her head as she placed the spark rocks in a hidden pocket of her waist wrap. She waved to Gilda to follow her as she began to walk deeper into the rock, lit by the orange and red glow of the torch.

It was a thin squeeze, an average-sized Viking would have enormous difficulty trying to wiggle their way through the small hallway that was squished between two rock faces, but the two young girls managed to shift through the hallway with little difficulty. Thick roots would jut out of cracks in the wall and branch across the small gap to the other side forcing the two girls to crouch down in some places to get by. They traveled for about five minutes through the dark hallway before a small light began to shine from the other side. It wasn't much longer before the hallway opened up and revealed a large cavern in the mountain.

The rock and dirt surrounded them on all sides except for a single opening in the upper right of the cavern wall. A large waterfall rushed down on the outside and spilled into the large opening creating an offshoot of water that cascaded down the rock face and fell into a small pool of crystal clear water below. The sounds of the storm outside still presided but the waterfall that guarded the entrance refused it entry. The light from outside shown down into the cavern, covering everything in a soft blue glow. Deep green moss and grass covered the once hard rock and spread across the ground like a soft carpet. Roots, vines, and ferns decorated the walls of the cavern, and fire-flies danced in the air.

It was the huge tree in the center of all this that amazed Gilda the most. Its trunk must have been the same width as her house, and the smallest branches she could see must have been as thick as her waist, the ones she couldn't see stretched further up into the cavern where the light couldn't reach. Those she could see were hidden by masses of the hugest leaves she had ever seen, easily being able to cover

her face and have room to spare. The lowest branches seemed too heavy for the great tree to hold up any more because rather than staying suspended in the air, they instead rested on the ground. At some points they even went so far as to dip beneath the earth before popping back up again a few feet later.

Yet seeming to top everything off, a thin pebble pathway led through the branches of the tree and straight to a wooden staircase that led right up to a small house that rested in the very center of the huge tree. "This is where you live?" Gilda asked in astonishment as she stared open mouthed at the sight before her. The base of the house was supported mostly by the trunk of the tree and the larger branches that stretched out underneath it, but every now and again there was the stray post that jutted out from the ground to support a section of the house that the branches were to spread out to properly support. The main material that made up the house seemed to be old chunks of wood from the hulls of ships making an almost curved form to the walls of the house, even being a little lopsided in some places. It also seemed to be constructed around the tree rather than the tree around the house, as small holes were cut out of the walls and ceiling of the house where thick branches of the tree jutted out from inside. Even so, it was a magnificent achievement of craftsmanship. "I know it's not much," Valka smiled "but it's home."

"I found this place about three years ago." Valka explained as Gilda climbed the staircase and up to the doorway. "I was exploring the mountain when I stumbled through the waterfall on accident and ended up almost falling in. I found the rock hallway only a few days later." Valka smiled as she held open the door of the treehouse and allowed Gilda to enter before her.

The inside was even more enthralling than the outside if that was believable. The thick branches that were seen jutting out of the house on the outside were being used as various forms of furniture which were draped with a decorum of stitched together rags. Many of the higher branches were used as shelving for broken jars that held herbs and fruit. Gilda took a few steps forward into the house and couldn't help noticing the creak of the wood floor underneath her. When she looked down she found the wood planks placed in a web like design that stretched out across the entirety of the house and centered on an extremely large branch that jutted out of the floor and split in half before exiting through the roof. In the center of this large split was a small chest. Almost a foot higher than what her fingers could reach. She had half a mind to ask Valka what it concealed, but the chest seemed to emit an aura around it that made her feel as if she was already receiving a large secret simply by knowing it was there. So she held her question back for another time and instead focused more on the other objects around her.

Random objects hung from the ceiling: some that glittered, some that were nothing more than a string of sea-shells and others that when you connected them together clinked together in sounds that made no sense but were still pleasing to the ear. In the back of the house, two branches that grew side-by-side held something very peculiar. It looked like a fishing net that had its edges tied on to the two branches and two thin planks spread the netting apart creating a basket-like look to it. But the only thing it held was a pair of thick blankets which were quickly removed by Valka. She cocooned one of the blankets around herself before handing the other over to Gilda

who wasted no time wrapping herself within its warm embrace and wiping the excess water from her face.

Valka however propped her staff against the side of the center branch and began removing her boots and the socks from her feet. Finding this a better idea than staying in wet clothes, Gilda followed by example. Not long after all articles of clothing, other than their skivvies, were hanging up on one of the higher branches of the house to dry and the two girls were sitting in the middle of the room in a rare moment of having their hair undone from their usual braids and buns to allow it to dry.

A small jar sat between the two of them with the word 'Blackberries' scribbled on the side of it in charcoal, each girl taking their turn to pick out one of the ripe black morsels and attempting to toss them into the other's mouth. Each of them were laughing as the little berries bounced off their mouths and they would both quickly grasp for the little berry with their hands before it reached the floor so they could pop it into their own mouth. More often than not Gilda would give the berry to Valka so she could eat it and Valka would respond by shoving the berry back stating fair was fair and it was her berry.

As the game wore on the berries quickly dwindled in number and the storm outside continued to worsen signaling its continuing throughout the night. It was only when the last berry was tossed and eaten that Valka got up and began readying a spot for her friend to sleep. It wasn't until she began to yank out another fishing net from a trap door in the floorboards that Gilda bothered to ask "What is that for?"

Valka looked at Gilda in confusion until she pointed to the net hanging from the two branches. "Oh!" Valka laughed "It's a hanging bed; you sleep in it."

"Off the ground?" Gilda asked warily. Valka froze and looked at Gilda who eyed the distance between the netting and the floor and felt a twinge of sadness for the girl before pulling the second net back under the floor boards and instead digging out all the blankets she managed to procure over the last few years and even dug out the makeshift mattress she had made before discovering the hanging bed. She draped the items down on the wood starting with the mattress in an attempt to soften the floor beneath them, Gilda however didn't seem to mind the new placement as she happily plopped herself down on the blankets and snuggled into them. Just as fast as she had closed her eyes they snapped back open "Holy ODIN!"

Valka jumped at the sudden exclamation worriedly asking "What? What's wrong?"

"What IS this?" Gilda asked in pure happiness "It's the softest thing I've ever lain on in my LIFE!"

Now understanding that her friend was not under any duress Valka dropped all levels of worry and replaced it with bewilderment. "It's a mattress." Valka responded flatly as she watched her friend now roll around on the makeshift bed in utter glee.

After having her fill of rolling around on the now proclaimed 'softest bed in Midgard' Gilda sat up and asked "How do you make

it?"

"It's just two thin sheets of fabric sown together with wool stuffed inside it." Valka responded as she slipped inside of her own bed.

"Who taught you how to make it?"

Valka froze in her attempts to drag her blanket around her, thinking for just a moment on how to reply to the statement before continuing with her work and slowly replying "Nobody taught me, it's just something we had from where I came from." And with that Valka quickly hopped into the hanging net and drug the blanket over her head in the hopeful attempt to end the conversation like usual, but Gilda either didn't seem to understand the gesture or was too stubborn to let go of the subject.

"Where you came from? Where was that?"

"Gilda," Valka sighed "now is not the time-"

"Oh, come on! You never talk about where you came from." Gilda exclaimed, cutting off her friend "The place you lived before can't be that bad. What was it, the Shivering Isles?"

"No."

"Hysteria?"

"No."

"Bog-Burglar Islands?"

"No."

"It can't be Villainy."

"No."

"Oh, thank Odin."

"I'm not from a Viking island, you happy now?" Valka groaned in frustration before once again covering her face with the blanket and sending out a muffled "Now go to sleep."

Silence lasted in the tree house for a few seconds before the blanket was taken from Valka's head and Gilda asked "Was it Iceland?"

"NOO!" Valka yelled out as she sat up and faced her friend. "Look, even if you do manage to guess it right I'm just going to say 'no' to it until you run out of places to guess."

"Alright. Alright." Gilda said as she held up her hands in mock surrender before she said "Just as long as you're not a Roman I'm good with whatever you are."

Valka froze at the statement for just a moment before recollecting herself. "Why Romans specifically?" Valka tried to ask nonchalantly.

"Well, Romans are like the human equivalent of dragons as far as Vikings are concerned." Gilda explained as simply as if she were discussing the weather "Roman's are ruthless conquerors that only want to spread themselves across every inch of the world they can get their filthy hands on."

"oh,...I see." was all that Valka was able to respond with.

"Your... not a Roman,... are you Valka?"

"I never said I was."

"You didn't say you weren't."

"I didn't say I wasn't British either."

"VALKA! Are you Roman or not!?" Gilda yelled.

"Why do you need to know?!" Valka yelled back in anger "Why would it matter if I was British, or Roman, or... Icelandic?! They tossed me out of there, they viewed me as something that needed to be disposed of! A runt! Misfortune! They HATED ME! Just like everyone else in this DAMN village!" Gilda stood there in shocked silence at the out-burst, but at the moment Valka didn't care about what her friend thought of her and just continued to yell "If anything this place is worse than my last home! At least when I was hated there they had the decency to shove me out of their lives! But here?! Oh NO, We can't have THAT now can we!? Valka has to stay here for years before she can leave, while we just run her down and try to bash her brains out for fun!"

At this point in time Valka's rant had dissolved into angry tears and she had to choke back a sob before she could speak again. "It doesn't matter where you came from. If the people didn't want you there, you weren't one of them anyway." Finally Valka's rant had come to a close and the two girls simply tried to recuperate from the after effects. One in standing silence and the other lying down on her hanging bed trying to wipe away the few tears that had managed to fall from her face.

Gilda had never seen Valka become so angered before, nor had she had even the slightest understanding of exactly how great a pain Valka had refused to show until now. It took her a moment to find her feet, but when she did Gilda slowly backed away from Valka before quietly stating "Okay,... You're right... It doesn't matter, and I shouldn't have pushed the subject so far. I'm sorry." With that said Gilda laid herself back down and re-positioned herself on the makeshift bed for sleep.

For several minutes only the sound of the storm crashing outside filled the room, and Gilda couldn't help but think that this would very likely be the last time she and Valka would ever interact together. Expecting this to be the last night they'd spend together Gilda sighed and closed her eyes so she could at least be well rested before she left her friend's side for good. She was almost asleep when the silence was suddenly broken, and the horrid symphony of the storm was interrupted.

"I had an older sister." Gilda opened her eyes and twisted around in

the bed to face Valka who now laid back in the fishing net as she stared up at the ceiling with a pensive look on her face. "You remind me of her a lot." Valka quietly stated as she turned to smile at Gilda for a moment before twisting back to look up at the ceiling again. "You two have the same strength, and the same unmatched skill with your favored weapon. You also share the same honorable kindness."

Gilda softly smiled at this small comparison to someone Valka held dear to her. "Did you have any other family members?" Gilda tentatively asked not wanting to break the fragile bridge that seemed to have formed between her and Valka in that moment.

She needn't have worried however as Valka only smiled at the question and began telling Gilda more and more of her past. She omitted any names, calling everyone by their generic titles like mother, brother, father, or that fishing guy; but Gilda listened silently as Valka began to retell some of the memories that only she had known about until this moment. To break even, Gilda would add in one of her own stories to help loosen some of the tension from Valka before allowing her to continue. The two switched memories back and forth, good and bad, all night.

Valka understood that most of what she spoke was only a small overlay of what was really there but as she continued to speak she couldn't help but feel just a little lighter with each memory that was shared, and she found herself spinning out memory after memory of her childhood to Gilda who was just as willing to give an understanding ear to listen. It wasn't until she heard the light snore coming from her friend that Valka ceased her reminiscing, and she happily fell asleep listening to the sound of the storm slowly subsiding into a simple rain before clearing away to show the starry night sky.

To Be Continued

****Go to the "The Viking Answer Lady webpage." That's where I'm getting most of my food information. The violet fruit that Valka is gathering is supposed to be a version of a plum.****

****SPOILER ALERT****

****Stoick is coming in the next chapter!****

6. Authors note

****Authors Note****

****Okay, it appears that I have overestimated myself. I seem to be having an incredibly difficult time trying to get through a writers block and I am afraid I will not be uploading the next chapter until the movie HTTYD 2 has been released and I have calmed down from the aftermath. So I apologize for the agonizing wait that I have so far put you through, but hopefully I can fix my brain so I can continue my story.****

****I will be continuing the story like I originally intention-ed, all the way to the end. I'm just not going to finish it in the time period I had originally set for myself.****

****Please keep following for now, I do appreciate your support in this.****

****Yours truly****

****Valkafinatic****

End
file.